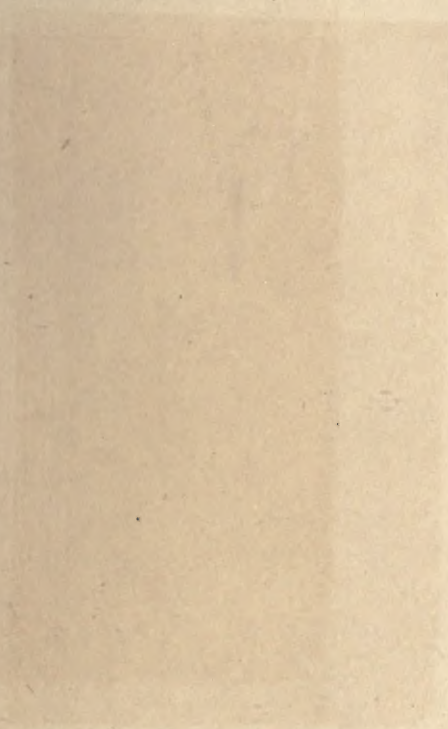


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SOME NEW  
LITERARY VALUATIONS



# Some New Literary Valuations

BY

**William Cleaver Wilkinson**

Author of "THE EPIC OF SAUL," "THE EPIC OF PAUL,"  
"THE EPIC OF MOSES," "MODERN MASTERS  
OF PULPIT DISCOURSE," Etc.



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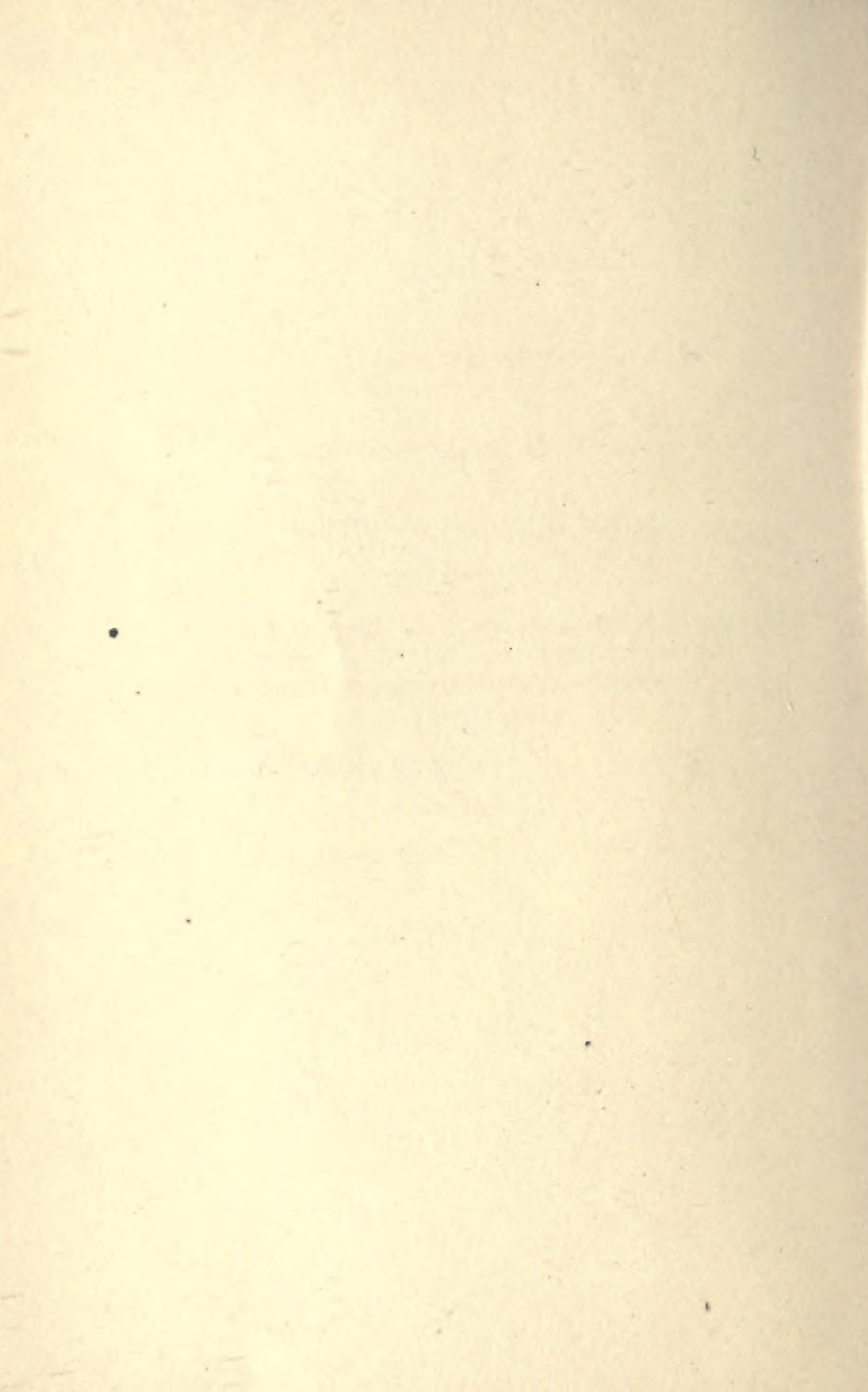
TO

**Arthur Lawrence Lesher**

AFFECTIONATELY

IN MEMORY OF A SUMMER LONG AGO ON THE  
HUDSON SPENT IN DELIGHTFUL JOINT  
STUDY AND ENJOYMENT OF  
LITERATURE

**William Cleaver Wilkinson**





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WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS AS  
MAN OF LETTERS





## WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS AS MAN OF LETTERS

### I

MR. HOWELLS'S reputation as a writer is very high. Is it as high as it ought to be? Is he valued at his worth? What is his worth? Is it that of a great writer? If not, wherein is his lack? To consider these questions and attempt an answer to them is the object of the present paper.

Let us begin—we need not engage to pursue this course throughout, but let us begin—in the use of a method which we may call the method of exclusion. That is, we will, if my readers agree, enumerate some of those respects in which assuredly Mr. Howells as a writer is *not* lacking. It is a serious thing to reflect that he is now no longer a young man, that he has even reached an age at which it is sadly safe to assume the greater part of his work in literature to have been already done. This is justly occasion of regret, but it is regret tempered with grateful consciousness that the volume of his production is large, is indeed ample enough for us to be able to say that, at least in affluence of productive power, Mr. Howells does not lack, that in this important respect he is clearly entitled to high rank among men of letters. He has

been exemplarily industrious with his pen. But that is blameworthy understatement of the fact. The fact is that Mr. Howells's literary industry and fruitfulness have been extraordinary.

He has applied himself with long-continued assiduity not only to accumulating quantity, but to securing quality, in literary production. He has been a diligent, a self-tasking, a successful, student and practitioner of literary art. The result is the achievement of a style which, for purposes such as his, I am ready, with all deliberateness, to declare to be, in my opinion, unsurpassed in English literature. It seems to me to be a nearly ideal instrument of expression; I do not know what element of perfection is wanting in it. Of course I can not mean that it is faultless. I would undertake, on challenge, to point out here and there faults in it. But they are not faults that at any time affect, to the degree of impairing, its general merit. In the first place it is so prevalingly lucid that exceptions of obscurity in it are neither frequent enough nor serious enough to count. In point of clearness, it may be pronounced a perfect medium for the transmission of the author's meaning. But that representation fails of giving the whole truth as to what I may call the conductivity of Mr. Howells's style. For his style is more than a simply transparent medium for the transmission of meaning. Beyond the negative, the passive, virtue of not obstructing the passage of thought, of being translucent, it has often, very often, the positive, the active, virtue of making thought salient, of projecting it, so to speak. It produces this effect without committing the fault which Macaulay was always committing, and which I am myself com-

mitting now, the fault, that is, of overemphasizing, of insisting too much. For a style of such evident potentiality, it is a singularly restrained style. It steadily refrains from carrying its virtue to excess.

It is a graceful style, an exceedingly graceful style. It is musical, rhythmic. Rhythmic, I say, and I do not mean sonorous. It does not deal in periods swelling to an orotund climax and close; but in the best sense in which prose may properly be rhythmic, Mr. Howells's style is delightfully, not emphatically, subtly rather, as it were latently, rhythmic. It does not measure off its words into feet, iambic or other. That is, it is not mechanically, and therefore monotonously, while it *is* invariably, musical. Picturesqueness is a marked trait of it. Words, phrases, start images to the reader's mind. Its vocabulary is immense, but its use of its vocabulary is choice, is exquisitely choice and nice. I must speak within bounds, and so I must say that to this praise Mr. Howells furnishes his critic with exceptions. He does occasionally coin a word, and he does not always make his coinage happy. This, however, is rare. He even commits, once in a century or so, the sin of pedantry in his use of a word. Now I have delivered my soul, and I may freely declare—indeed, I must do so—that Mr. Howells's style displays a truly remarkable command of language, alike in word, in phrase, in sentence, in paragraph—language fitted to express adequately his meaning; and his meaning often makes very heavy demands on the resources of expression. So many important points we have found wherein Mr. Howells as a writer is not lacking.

Is it only because Mr. Howells is still present among

us, because he is still producing literature at a quite unabated rate of fecundity—is that the reason, or what is the reason, why this contemporary and fellow-countryman of ours is not recognized as the great master of English style that he is? Everybody says that he writes charmingly so far as form of expression is concerned. But there is heard in this easy concession of praise an undertone that seems to mean, in a half-patronizing way, “Charmingly, he is so very clever, you know.” And it is true that Mr. Howells’s cleverness is so patent and so great that no wonder if the average reader of his works, the average reviewer and critic of them, is led to suppose that cleverness is the chief thing about them. It certainly is omnipresent in them, and, if it can not properly be said to force itself upon the attention, it must be said to be such that the attention can not help being captured by it, captivated with it. This is half a pity, for much as it is to be always triumphantly clever, it is far more to be what the cleverness may mask and hide—that is, really masterly—let us not fear, in application to the case in hand, to use a bolder word and say, great. By the way, whoever would see Mr. Howells’s cleverness, I will not say at its happiest, its best, but at its most unmixed, its purest, may study the “Word of Explanation” prefixed to his collection of papers entitled (misleadingly) “Literature and Life.” There such student will find cleverness sheer and simple. There is no other merit or value present to confuse the mind. The attempt made in that preface is not successful, but it is so cleverly made! Probably it would have been still cleverer not to make the attempt. That self-denial would at least have avoided the risk



of having the writer's perfect sincerity laid open to captious suspicion. It needs to be added that Mr. Howells's cleverness, if it does sometimes constitute a fault never constitutes a fault to deserve a sentence like that of Macaulay on Ovid, of whom, in one of his *marginalia* written at the end of the last volume of the poet's works and shown us by the great Englishman's biographer, he says: "A wonderfully clever man. But he has two insupportable faults. The one is that he will always be clever; the other is that he never knows when to have done." Mr. Howells has no "insupportable" faults; he will, to be sure, always be clever, but his cleverness, even when indulged to excess and become therefore too obvious, seldom fails to be agreeable.

Yes, as far as mere form of expression goes, Mr. Howells is one of the great masters. I have the more pleasure, and perhaps the more confidence, in saying this, because Mr. Howells, by various autobiographic disclosures, has made it plain that the consummate command of style which he possesses is his as the long result of sedulous culture on his part, not less than as the felicity of natural gift. His lifelong practise of literary production has been, in effect, one continuous study of style. The quantity of his work I have adverted to, but quantity might conceivably have tended to debase quality. The reverse is true in Mr. Howells's case. He has written in such a way, with so much literary conscience, that in degree as he wrote more, he constantly tended to write better. At least until very lately this was the case; I am sincerely sorry to feel compelled by candor to suggest at the present point such a qualification of my praise.

Consider the volume of his production. A hasty count of the titles of his published books tells a surprising story. Several years ago the number was about sixty-four. His chief work has been in fiction. The tale of his novels is impressively long. But besides novels he has written books of travel, of description, of biography, of reminiscence, of criticism, and he has published more than one volume of verse. In addition to the published books that stand to his credit as author, there is a very considerable body of writing done by him as reviewer under editorial anonymity in *The Atlantic Monthly* and in *The Nation*, not to reckon what he has contributed, serious in amount, to *Harper's Monthly*, partly as conductor of the department called "The Editor's Study," and partly as successor, after an interregnum, to George William Curtis, the incomparable, in "The Easy Chair." Besides all this he has been a frequent contributor to various other periodicals, as *The Forum* and *The North American Review*.

Altogether, Mr. Howells has been a very voluminous producer of literature. Voltaire is confessed perhaps the very greatest man of letters, as mere man of letters, in all literary history of whatever time, or whatever clime. His works are published in volumes numbering a little short of one hundred. The quantity of his product is largely what gives him his pre-eminent fame, though of course the quality of it too was necessary; without his wit and his style, he would have written his vast amount in vain. Now it is likely that if a collection were to be made of the fruits of Mr. Howells's talent, and if it were to be made with the extraordinary scrap-saving economy that has been applied to Voltaire's writings, the number of volumes

that would be filled would quite match the miracle of Voltaire's one hundred. This I say not to hint at a paralleling of the American with the Frenchman in point of literary standing and influence. The historic place of Voltaire was much to make him the power that he was. But for mere quantity of production, Mr. Howells is fully his match.

Now the question I would ask is this: Surveying the extensive tract of Mr. Howells's production, and appreciating justly the admirable English style in which all has been done, can we satisfy ourselves that we make an adequate critical evaluation of the talent that was at work in it if we attribute the result to cleverness—cleverness carried to the *n*th power, if you please; that is, cleverness advanced to whatever preternatural degree? We are perhaps not prepared to answer that serious question, until we have done something in the line of critical assay beyond ascertaining that the style is such as we have found it to be. We need to inquire what is the quality of the matter that Mr. Howells presents to us in a form so satisfactory. Is the matter worthy of the form?

Of course, in the analysis of style, style proves to be so much a blending of matter and form that it is difficult to consider the two things separately. Still we have hitherto kept our attention pretty closely confined to mere form, and very fair form can no doubt be achieved by cleverness. Cleverness can do even more than that. It can dispense with great excellence of form, and still produce literary effects so speciously good that they will impose upon all but the very elect as effects proper to truly fine literature. Bulwer—the elder Bulwer—is an illustration. Cleverness accounts

for him, both in respect of his not very high achievement in style, and in respect of the matter of his production.

I need not affect to hold longer in suspense my opinion that mere cleverness, however consummate, never could achieve a style like Mr. Howells's. There is a grace, a charm, a tone of high breeding, literary and personal, inseparably entangled in Mr. Howells's way of expressing himself—in short, an intimate quality of style—that is far beyond the reach of mere cleverness. Still, as I have already said, Mr. Howells, whatever higher gifts are his, does possess in an extraordinarily high degree the gift too of cleverness. It seems to me that this fine gift of his, which has enabled him to accomplish many admirable things, has also been something of a snare to his genius. He has sometimes put his cleverness in exercise when he ought to have been employing his nobler gifts.

Nobody, I think, can possibly relish and admire more than I do the farces and comedies, frankly so called by him, in which Mr. Howells has allowed his humorous genius to have its freedom and play. And here, as well as anywhere, I may say that if there is in the world of literature, ancient or modern, domestic or foreign, a rarer, and at the same time a more abundant, humor than plays irrepressibly throughout Mr. Howells's works, then either my knowledge or my judgment must be at fault, for certainly I know of nothing that I should be willing to account superior. "Plays *irrepressibly*," I have just said. That adverb might seem to imply that in my opinion there is some extravagance, some excess, in the proportion in which Mr. Howells permits himself to be humorist when he



writes. But I do not think this; that is, I do not think it when I am considering the point as a mere matter of taste. Exceptions, no doubt, might be found, but in general an esthetic law of just parsimony and reserve seems to prevail with Mr. Howells in his indulgence of humor. It is not that he has ever the air of repressing himself. Rather he has the air of never having the temptation to exceed.

A part, an important part—indeed, a very important part—of the content of Mr. Howells's books—that is, of the matter which he puts into such admirable form—has thus been, as it were incidentally, hit upon. A competent quantitative and qualitative analysis of his literary production would find humor to be a proportionally very large equivalent in it. And an indescribably delightful humor it is. Refined always, except when it is allowed to speak through some unrefined person of his fiction, subtle often, never obtrusive, lying in wait for the discerning and sympathetic reader at any and every turn of the text, it often keeps such a reader mantling his face with a well-nigh perpetual smile of surprise and delight. It is very seldom, indeed, if it does ever once happen, that he flats a note here. Against lapse of that sort, his personal sense of humor seems an adequate guardian of his humor in writing.

Is there wit as well as humor with Mr. Howells? Undoubtedly yes, but the humor predominates. The wit generally appears as piquant flavor to the humor. It needs also to be said that both the humor and the wit are kindly and sweet. If he takes off poor human nature for its weaknesses and its sins, he does not do it as Thackeray does, with the effect of leaving you



hopelessly convicted and ashamed of being yourself a sharer in such a nature. It is not, here, as an outside all-seeing observer and pitiless critic that he speaks. He most winningly associates himself with you and with all. "As we all of us like to do," he says, and we thus know he is willing to let it appear that he draws from himself, at least from a recognized and acknowledged potentiality in himself, when he discloses to you some trick or trait of yours which you would be glad to hide even from yourself if you could, but which you are obliged to confess belongs to your equipment of character.

The psychological insight which enables Mr. Howells to do this with aim so infallible, is in part the gift of nature, but in another part—a very large part—it is the product of experience, observation, reflection. And this leads me to say that I note in Mr. Howells's writings the presence of a rich, ripe wisdom, unobtrusively at work in them. This, the constant play of wit and humor, seeming doubtless to some to betray a constitutional levity of character in him, may have the effect to mask from any but very alert observation. I know no novelist, I know few authors in any kind of literature, from whose writings it would be possible to cull and collect, for a volume to be entitled "Wit and Wisdom" from such and such a name in letters, with finer and with ampler result than would follow from a labor to like end well conducted in the innumerable pages of Mr. Howells's works. I should like to see a volume of the sort dedicated to his genius, but after it was done I would rather read the excerpts in their proper places in the text which they illuminate and by which they are reciprocally illuminated.

So many things crowd forward into the mind claiming, each one, its right to be said in this paper that it is very difficult to maintain any due order and proportion in the saying of them all—if, indeed, they all may hope to get themselves said somehow at last. For instance, now, just as I am on the point of remarking that with Mr. Howells the gift of pathos, so often an accompaniment of the gift of humor, is not conspicuously, at any rate not commensurately, in exercise, I am irresistibly reminded of one exquisite touch of the pathetic, a touch not heart-breaking, not even heart-subduing perhaps, but deliciously heart-softening, which I must show the reader, if not for the sake of anything else, at least for the sake of the light it throws on the beautiful household affection and loyalty that are evidently a part of the author's character. Mr. Howells, at that time still scarcely more than a youth, has been appointed United States Consul in Venice. He is on the eve of setting out on his journey thither from the little town in Ohio where his father's family lived. It seemed a very serious parting that was before them, and the household kept themselves from dwelling too sadly upon it by reading together a novel which had interested them. Mr. Howells relates the incident by way of exceptional momentary digression into autobiography not strictly literary, in his book entitled "My Literary Passions"—a book such in spirit, form, and content that when I first read it, I read it with an involuntary sigh of wish that it never would end; I thought I should like to go on reading it forever, not over and over again the same things endlessly, for I have not the enviable faculty of enjoying in that way any literature except

poetry, but turning new pages day after day all my life long. Here are the simple few words of household history from Mr. Howells that affect me so tenderly:

"It [the novel] had a spell that held us like an anesthetic above the ache of parting, and the anxiety for the years that must pass, with all their redoubled chances, before our home circle could be made whole again. I read on, and the rest listened, till the wheels of the old stage made themselves heard in their approach through the absolute silence of the village street. Then we shut the book and all went down to the gate together, and parted under the pale sky of the October night. There was one of the home group whom I was not to see again: the young brother who died in the blossom of his years before I returned from my far and strange sojourn. He was too young then to share our reading of the novel, but when I ran up to his room to bid him good-by I found him awake, and, with aching hearts, we bade each other good-by forever."

I have consciously taken a risk in showing this passage as a specimen of pathos from Mr. Howells. It may easily happen that few among my readers will feel as I do the pathetic effect of it. Perhaps it quite needs to be read in its connection with what precedes. It there, as I have said, appears as an exceptional entrance into his narrative of matter not literary, but suddenly, momentarily, personal, domestic. Mr. Howells's "Literary Passions" constitutes his *Biographia Literaria*, and the autobiographer in it reveals himself throughout a personality so gracious, so winning, that one reading it sympathetically is prepared beforehand to respond to whatever appeal the writer incidentally, unexpectedly, makes to one's tender emotions.

Mr. Howells is often pathetic in his fiction. It

would be wrong to deny this, wrong not expressly to acknowledge it. But his pathos is of the sort that makes your heart ache with a pain which it hoards and hides, rather than with a pain that starts tears to your eyes. I have to own myself subject to the weakness of weeping somewhat easily at fictive wo, but I do not remember that I have ever shed a tear over one of Mr. Howells's pages. A true pathos nevertheless I have felt, not seldom, running through page after page of his writing. But it is a subdued, more than it is a subduing, pathos. May I call attention to the self-restraint with which Mr. Howells relates the incident of his parting for his journey to Venice—especially his denial to himself of the use of a dash before the last word quoted. He left it to his reader to supply the dash as he read. "With aching hearts, we bade each other good-by—forever!" One almost wishes even to supply an exclamation-point at the end. It was better to leave both these marks of punctuation, as Mr. Howells left them, to be felt.

Mr. Howells's pathos is penetrated with thought. It has nothing of the "Little Nell" quality. The "still, sad music of humanity" is heard in it. It wrestles with "the riddle of the painful earth." You are led to sympathize rather with the whole suffering race of mankind than with the individual sufferers of the story.

Still, even as a sentiment so little obtrusive, pathos is never felt to be the investing atmosphere of one of Mr. Howells's stories (or is "The Quality of Mercy" an exception?), as humor, on the other hand, sometimes is. Perhaps it is a matter of temperament in the author. Mr. Howells must be a man who is scorn-



fully well all the time. Else how could he so abound in animal spirits as he does? His animal spirits, one would say, can not be purely imaginative. He seems to possess an inexhaustible resource in this kind, to supply animal spirits in the utmost exuberance to one or more characters of his in nearly all his novels. These characters, it has to be acknowledged, are sometimes vulgar. Then, in representing them, or in allowing them to represent themselves, Mr. Howells displays a command of the proper dialect of slang for their use which is nothing less than astonishing. Often the indescribable picturesqueness of the slang comes out very fresh and salient in Mr. Howells's employment of it. It is curious, too, and it is noteworthy, that for the most part, perhaps indeed altogether—I do not recall an instance of exception—the author successfully contrives to keep himself quite separate and detached from the vulgarity that he thus represents—curious, because it is impossible not to feel all the time that Mr. Howells himself thoroughly enjoys what he portrays so to the life; and curious also because he is at least equally happy in representing refinement in speech, both the genuine and the euphuistic.

In fact, Mr. Howells has a dramatic quality in his genius which is as marked as any trait whatever of his equipment for producing fiction. He conceives his characters vividly and firmly, and he sets them in situation and dialogue with unsurpassed, unsurpassable, verisimilitude. Realism is what Mr. Howells himself would call this achievement; and realism it is if absolute creative truth to life is realism. Human nature and human society suffer vivisection at his



hands, and he presents you portions of the organisms, as living and as real as are the organisms themselves. I can not overstate my sense of the success with which Mr. Howells accomplishes this. Not even Tolstoy, whom he gratefully acknowledges his master, surpasses him herein. Nor does Tolstoy, much less does Thackeray, surpass him in deep divining insight into the arcana of the human heart. The most subtle, most elusive, most evanishing, thoughts, feelings, motives, are caught and fixed in the very act and article of volatilizing themselves, and, with an effect like that of instantaneous photography seizing and picturing the posture of a body in motion, shown you in a form of expression almost preternaturally faithful and adequate. The delays of action which this psychology costs are well fitted to exasperate the reader who wishes something outward and palpable to be doing all the time in the story that he reads. But to one contented to let the scene of incident and action be the breast of the character represented, there never is any lack of movement in a novel of Mr. Howells's.

Of Henry James, Mr. Howells says in his "Literary Passions," "I have read all that he has written, and I have never read anything of his without an ecstatic pleasure in his unrivaled touch." That is generous praise—I do not mean high praise, though high praise it is, but *generous* praise; that is, praise with a personal note in it bespeaking a generous nature in the man who bestows it. I can not yet quite say that I have read all that Mr. Howells has written, but I can truly say that having read a large part of it all, I have rarely read anything of his without a pleasure not seldom to

be described as "ecstatic" in his unrivaled touch. "In literary handling," Mr. Howells goes on to say of Mr. James, "no one who has written fiction in our language can approach him." That will do for Mr. Howells to say, but it would not do for me. Mr. Howells himself not only approaches Mr. James in the respect named, but in my opinion overtakes him, matches him. I lighted the other day on a page of *The Atlantic Monthly*, written no doubt by Mr. Howells from the point of view of the publishers, in which announcement was formally made of the taking over by the Boston magazine of *The Galaxy* of New York. It was a trifling matter, but I could not help having a literary pleasure in the taste and skill, and business tact no less, with which the thing was done. Mr. Howells's taste and judgment seem almost never to fail him, and the turn he is easily able to give to everything that he wishes to say is infallibly apt and felicitous.

From the autobiographic disclosures contained in Mr. Howells's "Literary Passions," it appears, and that without any slightest effect of ostentation on the author's part, that he, not having had a college education, has acquired for himself the learning, I might almost say the scholarship, I may certainly say the culture, which ordinarily attach only to the college graduate. He started very early to equip himself for the enjoyment and the practise of literature. He did this by constantly reading and constantly writing prose or verse. There never was a man by instinct, by training, by habit of life, more absolutely, more unreservedly, more passionately, a devotee of literature than William Dean Howells. This his "Literary

Passions" makes plain. What a charming confidence that is to the public, where Mr. Howells tells of a time (a time by eminence, we must call it, for was there ever a time with this doomed lover of letters that the same thing was not true of him?) when, under a particular influence of an author that he was reading, he found it, as he confesses, "impossible for me to say, or wish to say, anything without giving it the literary color"! There is the spirit which, joined to such a talent as Mr. Howells's, produces at length such writing as his. My own experience is a sufficient approximation to Mr. Howells's to enable me to feel everywhere in his writing the working of the spirit that he so describes; and, largely for this reason, it gives me an intimate delight, next to the delight I find in exquisite poetry, to sail on the smooth river of his prose, no matter to what port of destination; it is the sailing, much more than it is the arriving, that matters with me.

## II

I HAVE just now spoken of Mr. Howells's practise in verse. When I consider what masters in this kind young Howells put himself in school to, I can not but wonder that from all that study on his part of great poets, the choicest and best, and all that self-discipline to the poet's art, there resulted a product so little comparable in value to what he has accomplished in prose. He writes prose so musically, he knows words so well, he turns phrases so featly—why is it, I ask myself with surprise, that this gifted and accomplished man, this ardent and strenuous literary craftsman, this

impassioned suitor of the muse, has not done in verse something worthy to be admired alongside of what he has done in prose? Is it because he has done so much in prose? Has the prose habit with him been at fault? But against this conjectural account of the matter is to be set down the fact that his early verse misses as much as does his later that intimate indefinable somewhat which distinguishes poetry from prose. It seems, in part at least, to be a defect of his ear. His prose is written as if written in phrases, but his poetry is not written as if written in phrases of rhythm. Take this line from the piece entitled "Forlorn":

"And sadly follow after him down the street."

I read that and exclaimed to myself, What can be made of such a line by any art of scansion? The structure of the poem shows that this line where it stands should be a simple iambic pentameter. There suggested itself to me at first no way of disposing satisfactorily of the hypermetrical syllable, and, ignoring that difficulty, I found no way of making the accents yield me, with whatever help of pause, of crasis, of emphasis, an endurable line of verse. It long remained to my ear a quite irreducible line of mere prose, prose too without distinction. But I remember that De Quincey somewhere warns the adventurous man to beware who accuses a line from Milton of any lack of musical quality. The chances are, he declares, that some man will come along who will read the line in question properly and convict the accuser of mistake. So I said to myself, Let me be the man to read Mr. Howells's line properly; assuming this docile attitude toward the line, I evolved a scan-



sion that really takes away the extreme reproach that I had too hastily visited upon it. Make "after him" read "after 'im"; that is, give no emphasis whatever to the pronoun, but let it be supposed that the person in the case is understood without being pointed out. This redeems the line to the ear, not indeed as very musical, but as not deserving to be pronounced incapable of scansion. It must be acknowledged that the tenor of the context admits, if it does not even favor, the rendering which yields the scansion proposed.

The foregoing instance indicates not unfairly the prevailing lack in Mr. Howells's verse of the inevitable smooth flow that one's ear reasonably requires in what claims to be poetry. Try your ear on these two lines, from a thoughtful little bit of verse instinct with sound religious feeling, entitled "Thanksgiving" thus:

"For the heart from itself kept  
Our thanksgiving accept."

I should feel it to be a kind of sacrilege to treat the threnody which Mr. Howells devotes to the memory of that beloved younger brother of his, the parting from whom on his setting out for Venice he so touchingly describes in a passage of his "Literary Passions" shown the reader a few pages back—I should shrink, I say, from criticizing that further than simply to put the poem in contrast with the prose handling of the same subject. The collation of the two expressions will at once decide for the thoughtful reader which is Mr. Howells's true literary vernacular, verse or prose. Here is one, the third, of the six numbered divisions of the poem:



"He was almost grown a man when he passed  
 Away, but when I kissed him last

"He was still a child, and I had crept  
 Up to the little room where he slept,

"And thought to kiss him good-by in his sleep;  
 But he was awake to make me weep

"With terrible homesickness, before  
 My wayward feet had passed the door.

"Round about me clung his embrace,  
 And he pressed against my face his face,

"As if some prescience whispered him then  
 That it never, never should be again."

The form of the poem (Mr. Howells entitles it "Elegy on John Butler Howells," adding "Who died 'with the first song of the birds,' Wednesday morning, April 27, 1864")—the form of the poem was obviously given Mr. Howells by Whittier's "Maud Muller," but Whittier's "Maud Muller" failed to give Mr. Howells its incommunicable tinkling sweetness. "Celestial music" is Mr. Howells's form of ascription to the canorous quality of Whittier's verse; but one has to understand that high adjective in a different sense from the sense it naturally bears in application, for instance, to Milton's music. To me Whittier's music is rather a "warble liquid sweet" than a strain to be described as "celestial," if that word be held to its proper transcendent connotation.

Mr. Howells testifies that his own absorbing earliest literary ambition was to be a poet and nothing else. I, for my part, have such a kind of sacred reverence for an ambition like that in any man that I should instinctively shrink from seeming to do it the least

dishonor by denying to it, even so haltingly as in Mr. Howells's case I have done, the acclaim that follows successful achievement. But elsewhere Mr. Howells tells us that, beaten back by persisting successive failures to secure recognition as poet, he finally turned his efforts in the direction of prose. So then his sense of vocation to poetry was not quite a compelling sense, and we may feel free to acknowledge, with himself, that he did wisely to let his talent find its chief means of expression in prose. And yet I must not be understood to regard his verse as devoid of merit and value—of even true poetic merit and value. Of merit and value in content of thought and feeling it could not be devoid and be Mr. Howells's production. The little poem entitled "Moving," and characterized as "A Sketch," is a fairly successful experiment in dactylic hexameter verse, having real charm in fine feeling and in beautiful description, as let witness the following:

"Sweet was the smell of the dewy leaves and the flowers in the  
wild-wood,  
Fair the long reaches of sun and shade in the aisles of the forest.  
Glad of the spring, and of love, and of morning, the wild birds  
were singing:  
Jays to each other called harshly, then mellowly fluted together;  
Sang the oriole songs as golden and gay as his plumage;  
Pensively piped the querulous quails their greetings unfrequent,  
While, on the meadow-elm, the meadow-lark gushed forth in  
music,  
Rapt, exultant, and shaken with the great joy of his singing;  
Over the river, loud-chattering, aloft in the air, the kingfisher  
Hung, ere he dropped like a bolt, in the water beneath him;  
Gossiping, out of the bank flew myriad twittering swallows;  
And in the boughs of the sycamores quarreled and clamored the  
blackbirds."

Goethe's "Hermann and Dorothea" is irresistibly recalled by the poem. Of lyric strains in Mr. Howells's verse these two stanzas are favorable specimens:

"But oriole, my oriole,  
 Were some bright seraph sent from bliss  
 With songs of heaven to win my soul  
 From simple memories such as this,  
 "What could he tell to tempt my ear  
 From you? What high thing could there be,  
 So tenderly and sweetly dear  
 As my lost boyhood is to me?"

"But oriole, my oriole"—simple as it is, that one line, with its four words only, and its repetition of the one exquisitely musical word to make them four—is it not fine? But would it have been written if "Maryland, my Maryland" had not been in the poet's ear? A curious question merely.

It would be wrong not to take some account here of a volume of verse from Mr. Howells's hand published in 1895 under the title, "Stops of Various Quills." This volume is made up of short pieces having the character of epigrams—which word, indeed, would have been a suitable title for the collection, a title more descriptive than the one actually adopted by the author from Milton's "Lycidas." The tone and the tenor of the contents are marked rather by uniformity, not to say monotony, than by variety. The epigrams are full of thought, and they make interesting reading. They are to be judged for their substance and not for their form. Poems they hardly are, but very sententious reflections cast in the mold of verse. The verse never flows, but makes its way laboriously, jolting here and there over misplaced accents and emphases,

and producing often, if not even for the most part, the effect of prose, prose far more stiff sometimes than is the wont of Mr. Howells's prose confessed. One is oppressed, or at least depressed, rather than enlivened, by the reading. But the pieces are almost all of them very provocative of thought, thought in general not unsalutary, though far from exhilarating. Here is a piece entitled "Heredity," in which the author makes perhaps his farthest apogee in repulsion from the spirit of poetry:

'That swollen paunch you are doomed to bear  
 Your gluttonous grandsire used to wear;  
 That tongue, at once so light and dull,  
 Wagged in your grandam's empty skull;  
 That leering of the sensual eye  
 Your father, when he came to die,  
 Left yours alone; and that cheap flirt,  
 Your mother, gave you from the dirt  
 The simper which she used upon  
 So many men ere he was won.

"Your vanity and greed and lust  
 Are each your portion from the dust  
 Of those that died, and from the tomb  
 Made you what you must needs become.  
 I do not hold you aught to blame  
 For sin at second hand, and shame:  
 Evil could but from evil spring;  
 And yet, away, you charnel thing!"

In being repelled from the spirit of poetry, was the writer also repelled from his usual humanity?

Take this for another specimen of these dense epigrams; the title is "Life":

"Once a thronged thoroughfare that wound afar  
 By shining streams, and waving fields and woods;



And festal cities and sweet solitudes,  
 All whither, onward to the utmost star:  
 Now a blind alley, lurking by the shore  
 Of stagnant ditches, walled with reeking crags,  
 Where one old heavy-hearted vagrant lags,  
 Footsore, at nightfall limping to Death's door."

That is powerful. But would Mr. Howells undertake to explain how it goes toward "telling for human brotherhood," as he has confessed nobly his sense of obligation to make his work in the world somehow do? I fear his epigrams, powerful as they are, are too somber to be very helpful to the reader. Perhaps, indeed, they chasten as well as sadden.

How far off from Paul's exultant "O Death, where is thy sting?" is this thanatopsis; the title is "If."

"Yes, death is at the bottom of the cup,  
 And every one that lives must drink it up;  
 And yet between the sparkle at the top  
 And the black lees where lurks that bitter drop,  
 There swims enough good liquor, Heaven knows,  
 To ease our hearts of all their other woes.

"The bubbles rise in sunshine at the brim;  
 That drop below is very far and dim;  
 The quick fumes spread and shape us such bright dreams  
 That in the glad delirium it seems  
 As though by some deft sleight, if so we willed,  
 That drop untasted might be somehow spilled."

### III

MR. HOWELLS in the course of his delightful confidences to the public repeatedly confesses himself to have been so deeply affected by this author and that as to have fallen into the way of consciously imitating

first one and then another among them. He occupies now a position in the world of letters so commanding and so assured that he can well afford to be thus modest and frank in admitting whatever lack of intellectual independence may be implied in the disposition to imitate. I, for my part, interpret the disposition in Mr. Howells's case to be a certain complaisance and generosity that carry over delighted admiration into imitation, simply as the most natural and the best expression of that fine sentiment. Indeed, the spirit of complaisance in him, the well-bred inclination to conform, prevents him, I think, from being the ideal critic that in other respects he is so well qualified to be. He does not seem to have been born a critic; otherwise he would hardly, even in the enthusiasm of youth, have abandoned himself, however transiently, to some of the literary devotions that he makes confession of. There is, for sufficient example, the case of Alexander Smith and his "Life Drama"; read what Mr. Howells has to say of this case:

"I had passed through what I may call a paroxysm of Alexander Smith, a poet deeply unknown to the present generation, but then acclaimed immortal by all the critics, and put with Shakespeare, who must be a good deal astonished from time to time in his Elysian quiet by the companionship thrust upon him. I read this now dead-and-gone immortal with an ecstasy unspeakable; I raved of him by day, and dreamed of him by night; I got great lengths of his 'Life Drama' by heart, and I can still repeat several gorgeous passages from it; I would almost have been willing to take the life of the sole critic who had the sense to laugh at him, and who made his wicked fun in *Graham's Magazine*, an extinct periodical of the old extinct Philadelphian species."

I certainly was not myself the "sole critic" referred

to by Mr. Howells, and I do not remember to have known that any such critic had written; but I have still among the literary memorials of my youth a very carefully written critical paper in which I made bold to "laugh at" Alexander Smith and his pretensions, while still the craze about him was at its height.\* I was naturally less complaisant, and quite helplessly more critical, than Mr. Howells, while he and I were young together—together in time, but alas—for me, alas!—not in place. That critical paper of mine, perfectly sound in its main critical contention as I believe it still, I could not have got published then if I had tried, and I do not remember that I tried; but the fact that I held, after due study, such destructive view of the "Life Drama" gave me an opportunity which I recall with pleasure of the first and only effective personal contact that I ever had with James T. Fields, the Boston publisher. I was seeking to earn some money to pay my way through college, and during the summer vacation following my freshman year I was sent by a New York newspaper (at fifty dollars a month, expenses paid!) to solicit advertisements for its columns. I made a business call on the house of Ticknor & Fields, and, singular to say, achieved a personal interview with Mr. Fields himself. He was entirely gracious, but with an air of *de haut en bas* told me that the newspaper which I represented was not a suitable advertising medium for such books as his

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\*With some hesitation, lest the confidence be misunderstood, I decide to let readers who may be curious about this "dead-and-gone immortal" see the critical paper referred to, shown with its inseparable saucy youngness bristling thick upon it. It may be tolerated, at least for the sake of the excerpts from the poem that it contains. It will be found, shortened by excisions, in an appendix at the close of the volume.

firm published—books, he said, of high-class literature. “For instance, Alexander Smith’s ‘Life Drama,’ ” I had the audacity promptly to say. Mr. Fields looked at me with surprise and said, “It sells well.” “Yes,” I persisted, “but what kind of literature is it?” I think he was a little amusedly stimulated by an encounter of such very unexpected sort with a youngster who had called on a matter of business, and he permitted himself the condescension to enter into a somewhat discursive talk with me about literature, in the course of which he showed me a new book his house had just published. It was Thoreau’s “Walden, or Life in the Woods.” He pointed out to me a passage in it which he thought had something of the imaginative quality and value of Sir Thomas Browne, and ended by handsomely presenting me a copy of the volume. That was all the money profit which I took from the interview, for Mr. Fields got off, agreeably enough, without giving me an advertisement for my paper! But I should not have gained even so much if I had not then dared to differ critically from my coeval, Mr. Howells, and the most, on the subject of Alexander Smith’s “Life Drama.”

If now I quote here a sentence from one of Mr. Howells’s anonymous editorial expressions written in his quality of book-reviewer for *The Atlantic Monthly*, I shall not need to say much more of his critical work, which, while it is, as I think, too generally “genial,” never lacks the charm of urbane and beautiful style. Of John Morley’s writing he says, reviewing his “Rousseau,” “It has pretty nearly all the virtues and charms of the best prose.” For commentary on this



evaluation of Morley's prose style, I beg only to refer the reader to what I have said elsewhere in the present volume of that writer as master of the art of English expression. When, to take another instance, he was speaking by the way concerning Goethe's "Faust," he wrote, "We [that is, we readers in general] do not generally understand that much of it [the "Faust"] is purposely common to commonplaceness, though redeemed by *the vastness and grandeur of the whole design*"—when, I say, he expressed himself thus, especially when he used the words I have italicized, I can not but think he just recklessly let himself go, to save his seemingly-bold, but very well-warranted, disparagement of the "much," by a large random concession, claim rather, in favor of the poem—claim which, in my own opinion, is about as far from critical truth and sanity as it would be possible to get. Of Shakespeare, and apropos of Shakespeare, Mr. Howells says things in his "Literary Passions" that show a very considerable working in him of the ferment of freedom from convention and make-believe; though here, too, he hedges with such strong expressions in praise of that great literary idol as lead me to wonder what he thinks of Tolstoy's Titanic iconoclasm applied to Shakespeare's pretensions. Does he, *can* he, after reading Tolstoy on "Lear," content himself with thinking simply that there the great Russian, his idolized master in fiction, betrayed the taint of intellectual unsoundness which not even his massive and masterly genius, in general so sane, could wholly escape?

I said a little way back that Mr. Howells as critic was generally too "genial," but at least one important exception to this remark must be made. In his little

volume, "Criticism and Fiction," made up of papers that appeared first in a department of *Harper's Magazine*, this prevailingly bland and complaisant writer allows a sharp, at times almost acrid, seeming-personal note of irritation to qualify his utterance. I find myself in agreement with almost all he says in those papers, especially with the much that he says having a distinctly ethical purport; but I can not help wishing that he had not permitted his serenity to be disturbed when he wrote them.

#### IV

I HAVE been uneasily aware all along that I was not, as I should be, illuminating my text with garnish of illustrative instances from Mr. Howells's works. I have collected an impossible number of such instances, intending to introduce them as might from time to time seem appropriate, but to say simple truth my embarrassment of riches has overwhelmed me. Let me assemble some of them here regardless of suitable setting. If I should attempt to illustrate adequately Mr. Howells's humor I should need the room of this whole paper, and more. The same might fairly enough be said of the delicious descriptions of nature—land, and sea, and sky—which, never in excess, are abundantly interspersed throughout his luminous pages. Deep divining observations, bits of gnostic wisdom, sound and wholesome, on almost every topic of human interest, are so plentiful that the thoughtful reader is compelled to wonder how one man's experience and reflection could have furnished them all.

Now, if only to show that the critic who writes here

is not drowned and lost in the admirer, let me begin by pointing out a few things not admirable that I have noted in Mr. Howells. I said, pages back, that Mr. Howells, of all things in the world not to have been expected from him, is occasionally a sinner by pedantry in his diction. I instance: "veridical," "apparence," "indigeneity," "silentious," "prepotent," "vastated," "gracility," "campestral," "inteneration," "periculations," "retrorsive," "reclame." It will be observed that these pedantries of diction are such as to imply some true scholarship in the writer who is guilty of them. But scholarlike accomplishment, scholarlike instinct even, has its limitations with Mr. Howells. He quasi-humorously speaks of the early "solid men" of Boston as "conscript fathers," apparently not feeling the true connotation of the word "conscript," as used in its Latin form, for instance, by Cicero. He has the phrase "*paucity* of his experience." He makes a certain anglomaniae wife think an English noble "the finest gentleman in the world," while regarding her own husband as still finer—"a mystery of faith," he says, "easily tenable, though not susceptible of *exegeisis*"; in another place, concerning a minister who was suddenly killed just before he was to give publicly a "theory and justification" expected from him of a certain purpose of his, he says, "His death was in no wise *exegetic*"—two uses of language not assuredly betokening a nice instinct of scholarship in lively exercise for the moment. In writing "Delphos" for "Delphi," did Mr. Howells obey a chivalrous sense of loyalty due to such a master, forbidding him to appear corrective of Emerson—from whom he had just quoted a passage commit-

ting the same mistake? "Reluctance *from* writing," "reluctance *from* meddling," Mr. Howells says—turns of expression which, if intentional Latinisms, lack precedent, I should say, and they certainly seem overstrained; but the like use of language occurs even in such a connection of phrase as this (it is of Salem and Hawthorne that he is speaking): "the local indifference to her greatest name or her *reluctance from it*." "Supposititious" for "hypothetical"? That Mr. Howells should have written the non-existing and quite impossible word "choately," using it as if it were the opposite of "inchoately," must be set down as a veritable "curiosity of literature." That again a man so versed in his Bible as is Mr. Howells, and so saturated as he is with true literary sense, and I must add a man evidently so well acquainted with classic language, should for a moment have misconceived the scriptural "purple and fine linen" in a way such that he could write of "people whose houses are rich and whose linen is purple and fine"—well that, too, had better be set down simply as a "curiosity of literature." Curious again it is to find Mr. Howells in his "Literary Passions," saying, "I had such a fascination for methodical verse," and again, "No one seemed to feel the intense fascination for them that I did"—instead of saying, "methodical verse had such a fascination for me," "No one seemed to feel the intense fascination in them that I did." A climax of surprising lapse on Mr. Howells's part is "Spencerian" for "Spenserian," repeatedly occurring, and occurring once at least even in editorial contribution to *The Atlantic Monthly*—whose proof-reader, one would suppose, should have called the writer's attention to his misspelling. (Since wri-



ting this suggestion about *The Atlantic Monthly* proof-reader, I have come upon the following in Mr. Howells's entrancing book, "Literary Friends and Acquaintance"; "The proof-reading of *The Atlantic Monthly* was something almost fearfully scrupulous and perfect"—a remark which is followed by a detailed statement of the numerous stages of oversight and correction through which the proof-reading passed. "The head reader" Mr. Howells credits with "abundant and most intelligent comments on the literature"—all of which makes Mr. Howells's "Spencerian" for "Spencerian" still more remarkably a "curiosity of literature.") Is it slack proof-reading that lets Mr. Howells print "council" for "counsel" in "had taken much council with himself"?

These peccadilloes in diction, insignificant in number when the volume of Mr. Howells's production is considered, should serve, in any sound critic's estimation, as foils to set off by contrast the general impeccability of his style, rather than as basis for the least deduction from his transcendent merit. The like may be said of a few, very few, offenses against taste that surprise one amid the prevailing admirable refinement with which he thinks and feels and expresses himself. It becomes very clear to the attentive reader of his fiction that Mr. Howells is himself personally an almost sybaritic admirer and enjoyer of beauty in women. This appears from many incidental expressions of his, as well as from the delight he finds in conceiving and describing lovely women of various types. Nothing could exceed the modesty, the purity, the refinement, as well as the charm, with which he writes when indulging himself in these luxurious imaginations.

How could it be otherwise with a writer who, necessarily out of his own heart's experience, could say this beautiful, Sir-Galahad-like, thing, "There is something in a young man's ideal of women, at once passionate and ascetic, so fine that any words are too gross for it"?

One instance of what seems to me a slightly illicit excess I now recall; it is the only one. In his "Suburban Sketches"—productions in which the writer, still a young man, seemed to be finding himself, and young blood in him may be chargeable with the excess, if there is excess, in what I now show—Mr. Howells, after an early manner of his, was observing a group of strangers gathered in a railway station, to select and describe individuals from among them, and to imagine histories about them, when he singled out a "sweet young blonde"—"that sweet young blonde who arrives by most trains," he says—and dwelt a delicious moment or two in making a picture of her. She, "putting up her eye-glass with a ravishing air, bewitchingly peers round among the bearded faces, with little tender looks of hope and trepidation, for the face which she wants and which presently" bursts into view. She gives the owner of the face "a little drooping hand as if it were a delicate flower she laid in his; there is a brief mutual hesitation long enough merely for an electrical thrill to run from heart to heart through the clasping hands, and then he stoops toward her, and distractingly kisses her." So far all is unquestionable; but when Mr. Howells proceeds, "And I say that there is no law of conscience or propriety worthy the name of law—barbarity, absurdity, call it rather—to prevent any one from availing him-

self of that providential near-sightedness, and beatifying himself upon those lips—nothing to prevent it but that young fellow, whom one might not, of course, care to provoke”—when, I say, Mr. Howells goes to this length, *quære*, does he not transgress proper bounds? No impropriety in *any one's* (some stranger?) taking the liberty to beatify himself upon those lips? We might suppose the meaning was only to do this in imagination, but that supposition is forbidden by the close of the sentence. No very grave offense, but surprising in Mr. Howells.

“She scarcely gave herself time to *gulp* it,” he says of a lady who had just received an irresistible “bit of taffy.” “You spoke too late, as the Irishman said”—the reader knows the rest, and Mr. Howells uses twice this not very refined pleasantry, which had not, when he used it—any more than had the over-incubated egg in question—the recommendation of novelty and freshness. “He laid his heavy *paw* on her gloved fingers,” he says of Silas Lapham, father, at a moment of tragical crisis for himself and for the daughter referred to. That word “paw” has not, it seems to me, the right *feeling* in this place. Is it not a touch of something as near coarseness as could happen with Mr. Howells when, describing Silas Lapham in process of getting himself up for a social occasion, he says, “his large fists [begloved with much labor] hanging down on either side, looked, in the saffron tint which the shop-girl said his gloves should be of, *like canvased hams*”? Perhaps unfeeling, rather than coarse, is the proper characterization of that comparison. Picturesque, no doubt, it is, but it does not seem to treat Silas with sufficient kindness. “One young girl [among

certain 'lady boarders'] who was quite pretty had," Mr. Howells says, "a high, hoarse voice, *like a gander.*" This young girl is introduced by the novelist solely for the sake of furnishing to him the opportunity of saying that about her voice—she has not appeared before and she does not appear after. The comparison affects me as a quite unnecessarily harsh note. "*Horse*y people" does not seem to me a very choice expression. "The banker threw back his head and *roared.*" This banker is represented by Mr. Howells as an educated, cultivated gentleman, well-mannered, attentive to the social amenities, but he "*roared*"; and the occasion of his roaring was only that he had just heard of a suggestion, reported from some socialist leaders, that children compelled by law to attend school should be paid wages for the time thus lost to wage-earning labor. "*Roaring*" is never very good form, but some occasions might go far to excuse it—not, however, such an occasion as the one that set this gentlemanly banker off. Indeed, the occasion did not set him off. He set himself off. He *roared* argumentatively, not in vent of uncontrollable sudden amusement.

If it were not Mr. Howells, and if the temptation of that "sweet young blonde" were not the solitary instance I remember observing of such extravagance in humor on his part, it would have been absurd to make any note of it, even the lightest. But Mr. Howells is so playful without bounds, while yet happily always so playful within bounds—if the paradox will be permitted—that I could not refrain from noting the one case in which, as it seems to me, the Donatello latent in him frisked just for a moment into faun betrayed



only by the veriest doubtful twinkling tips of the ears. And again, if it were not Mr. Howells, and if Mr. Howells were not so attentive as he very noticeably always is to points of etiquette, it would have been absurd to note at all the apparent transgression of bounds in his making that well-mannered banker "roar" as he did, with throwing back of his head to emphasize his breach of decorum. And then too I ought to remember, *Silent leges inter arma*, and so the rules of strict social propriety relax themselves in the freedom of summer-resort-hotel society. Having raised these questions of taste, I now feel in conscience bound to say that I am overruled in nearly or quite every one of them by my monitress in the house. Let it then be understood that it is only "Mr. March" that objects, and that "Mrs. March" sustains Mr. Howells. "Mr. March" is obstinate and persists, but it may be that it is a subtle sense in him of the necessity of maintaining the rightful dominance of his sex.

Mr. Howells is so pronouncedly attentive to matters of good social form that a skilful reader might almost compile an adequate manual of instruction in the habits of good society from the pages of his fiction. This is not said as criticism, though Mr. Howells does, I think, go to the limits herein. His stories—for instance, "Silas Lapham," "The Minister's Charge," "A Chance Acquaintance," "The Lady of the Aroostook"—are replete with hints toward proper social behavior, which should make a quick-witted country boy or girl that had carefully read those books feel very much at ease thrust without notice into sophisticated urban environment. But the plan of those stories was such as almost to require the notices of

etiquette that plentifully bestrew them; and Mr. Howells was the better qualified to conduct stories so planned, from the fact that his own boyhood was cast, as it was, in that "Boy's Town" which he has made so delightfully realizable and memorable in his charming little book about it. A man who had been brought up from infancy in the midst of city surroundings, and had become immemorially familiar with the social usages of the cultivated and wealthy leisure classes, would neither have known the contrasts to these conditions which the moderately-circumstanced country people afford, nor have been so alertly observant as Mr. Howells shows himself to be, and to have been, of the ways of a world which had to him the stimulus of something new in his experience when he won his entrance into it.

The gentle reader may, if he pleases, take my scant gleanings of flaw in Mr. Howells's work as my testimony to the remarkable freedom from flaw that this consummate master of form has succeeded in achieving.

## V

Now how to make any adequate impression of the delectable humor that everywhere aerates and illumines what Mr. Howells writes! I can show specimens, but specimens reft from the context in which they are set will unavoidably have a comparatively flat effect. For example, you come upon this at the close of one of the lightest of Mr. Howells's books, "Their Wedding Journey"; the wedded pair have visited Niagara Falls, and they now cross in the railway train on the

great suspension bridge the formidable torrent rolling and writhing hundreds of feet below, in that horrible chasm which the waters have worn for themselves. The woman in the case is invited to cast her eyes downward and see what is beneath her, but she shudders and will not look. Instead she blinds herself with her handkerchief thrown over her face. "Thanks to this precaution of hers, the train crossed the bridge in perfect safety," Mr. Howells says.

A favorite humor of Mr. Howells's is the representation of a woman charged with something more than the average feminine inconsequence and caprice. Oftenest, perhaps, this woman is a lovable creature, who wins you as much in consequence, as in spite, of her foible; sometimes, however, there is a spice of sincere wickedness flavoring her character; but, whichever her quality, she is irresistibly amusing in Mr. Howells's hands. "A Traveller from Altruria" might almost be said to be of humor all compact, so prevalently droll—situation, character, dialogue—it is; but, there is a vein—there are several veins—of real wisdom, of sane philosophy, sociological, ethical, and even religious, running through it. Never in any literature was the conduct of dialogue in discussion of various topics more consummately skilful than it is in this work of Mr. Howells's. My amusement in reading it is absolutely clogged and hindered by my incessant, insistent, admiration of the writer's adroitness. The reliefs of interruption and digression, as well as of humor, introduced throughout, give it the necessary exemption from the tedium of monotony, and add the last touch of literary art to make this work the very consummation of what such a dialogue can be. I

think of Plato's dialogues, of Bishop Berkeley's, of Henry Rogers's "Eclipse of Faith" and "Greyson Letters," and many other such disputations, and I do not recall any in which the literary art surpasses that of "Altruria" or—for I will be frank with my opinion—even equals it. The cast of characters is, for the writer's purpose, admirable beyond praise, and they all talk each one as he should. As *he* should—*there* is a case, if ever there was one, when a pronoun of no gender is called for, to mean either "man" or "woman"—for among the persons of the dialogue in "Altruria" is a woman, a Mrs. Makely, who plays a very necessary part, and she may be taken as fairly representing Mr. Howells's feminine creations of the capricious, while distinctly conscienceless, type. The banker of the dialogue, not referring to her, but generalizing humorously about women as reasoners, says—"the logic of events" having been spoken of—"There's nothing so capricious as the logic of events. It's like a woman's reasoning—you can't tell what it's aimed at, or where it's going to fetch up; all that you can do is to keep out of the way if possible."

The company were assembled at a summer-resort hotel. Mrs. Makely had found a dressmaker in the daughter of a farmer's widow living in the neighborhood, and she was at this moment paying a patronizing visit at the house to see the invalid mother. She there encountered a son of the widow, a young man who had ideas of his own. " 'It's a great advantage, the city people going into the country so much as they do now,' said Mrs. Makely. 'They bring five million dollars into the State of New Hampshire alone, every summer.' She looked round for the general ap-



proval which this fact merited, and young Camp [the son] said [with sarcastic irony]: 'And it shows how worthless the natives are, that they can't make both ends meet with all that money, but have to give up their farms and go West, after all. I suppose you think it comes from wanting buggies and pianos.' 'Well, it certainly comes from something,' said Mrs. Makely, *with the courage of her convictions.*"

This woman conceived the idea of getting up a pay entertainment of some sort to help the local church people repair their house of worship. She resorted to expedients that the not overscrupulous "novelist" of the company (whose guest the Altrurian traveler was) thought of somewhat doubtful ethical quality. The good cause was her motive and defense. "No one," she exclaimed, "need be ashamed to enter the house of God"—she said *Gawd, in an access of piety*—"after we get that paint and paper in it."

The Altrurian was to give a talk about Altruria as the great attraction of the proposed occasion. This was arranged by Mrs. Makely. "There shall be no exclusion from my lecture on account of occupation or condition," the Altrurian had stipulated. "I can assure you, Mr. Homos, there shall be nothing of that kind," said Mrs. Makely. "Every one—I don't care who it is or what they do—shall hear you who buys a ticket." "She pushed hers [that is, her hand, as the connection shows] through my arm," says the novelist, "as we started for the dining-room, and leaned over to whisper jubilantly: 'That will fix it! He will see how much his precious lower classes care for Altruria if they have to pay a dollar apiece to hear about it. And I shall keep faith with him to the let-

ter.'” “I could not feel that she would keep it in the spirit; but *I could only groan inwardly and chuckle outwardly at the woman's depravity,*” comments the novelist, taking himself some share in the “depravity” that he deplored.

While the preparations are in progress for the entertainment, delightfully interrupted and delightfully resumed discussion goes on in the company. At one point, impending clash is predicted between capital and labor which alarms the novelist. “And what do you think would be the outcome of such a conflict? I asked,” he says, “with my soul divided between fear of it *and the perception of its excellence as material.*” Here comes out most amusingly a half-humorous, half-serious, motive which is very effectively recurrent at intervals throughout Mr. Howells's fiction. It appeared as early as when he wrote for *The Atlantic Monthly* the desultory papers which he afterward collected in the volume entitled “Suburban Sketches.”

These “Sketches,” by the way, betray youngness in the writer, but they also, and still more strikingly, indicate promise. They are very readable and very enjoyable, although rather obtrusively ambitious in style. Since I am incidentally and, even to myself, unexpectedly, speaking of these papers, I am impelled to show here, though out of place, a passage in which the non-Puritanic young writer almost rises to a Puritan strain in treating the subject of the theater. The stage performances described (with necessary slurring of parts too gross for description—but not for representation!) were of the notorious “Black Crook” order; Mr. Howells says:

"It was to be noted with regret that our innocence, our respectability, had no restraining influence upon the performance; and the fatuity of the hope cherished by some courageous people, that the presence of virtuous persons would reform the stage, was but too painfully evident. The doubt whether they were not nearer right who have denounced the theater as essentially and incorrigibly bad would force itself upon the mind, though there was a little comfort in the thought that, if virtue had been actually allowed to frown upon these burlesques, the burlesques might have been abashed into propriety. The caressing arm of the law was cast very tenderly about the performers, and in the only case where a spectator presumed to hiss—it was at a *pas seul* of the indescribable—a policeman descended upon him, and, with the succor of two friends of the free ballet, rent him from his place, and triumphed forth with him. Here was an end of ungenial criticism; *we all applauded zealously after that.*"

## VI

THE humorous recoil and rally, at the close of the foregoing, from the severe tone into which the essayist had unawares slid, may launch us here into a return to some exhibition of Mr. Howells's humor. The difficulty I encounter is that too much explanation seems always required to make the humor properly effective. The reader really needs to see the humorous stroke *in situ* in order to enjoy it to the height. There are many consecutive pages of Mr. Howells's writing that will keep a truly sympathetic reader so constantly amused that his facial muscles will set in a smiling expression such as to realize what Mr. Howells, with inimitably humorous self-observation, says was the experience of love-smitten young Corey, in "Silas Lapham," after a peculiarly satisfactory opportunity enjoyed by him of approach to the lady

whom he admired. Young Corey "looked radiantly up at the conductor who took his fare, with a smile that he must have been wearing a long time; *his cheek was stiff with it.*"

The "novelist," in "Altruria," compelled to see, and, through silence at least, submitting to share, the extremely questionable devices with which Mrs. Makely managed preparations for the entertainment, testifies, "I could not stand it, and I got up to go away, feeling extremely *particeps criminis.*" Previously, "I certainly didn't," said Mrs. Makely with triumph to a lady who, through the manager's *finesse*, had been made to feel the extreme desirableness of attending the entertainment, and who affected to suppose that this arch-manipulator understood her to have engaged two tickets at a dollar each—the original price—"I certainly didn't," said Mrs. Makely, "*with a wink of concentrated wickedness,*" the novelist adds, "*at me.*" Mrs. Makely now advanced the price from one dollar to two and a half a ticket, which the lady in question sourly paid.

It is a most artistic relief to the humor that has been reigning and rioting for pages on pages, when Mr. Howells modulates toward the grave earnest of the Altrurian's lecture, with an interlude of landscape and weather to describe the circumstance of the occasion—which, such was the overwhelming success of the management and such the surprising popularity of the traveler from Altruria, had to take place out of doors in order to accommodate the great audience that mustered to hear the lecture. Who would not like to have been present under such auspices of environment as these?



"The sky overhead was absolutely stainless, and the light of the cool afternoon sun streamed upon the slopes of the solemn mountains to the east. The tall pines in the background blackened themselves against the horizon; nearer they showed more and more decidedly their bluish green, and the yellow of the newly fallen needles painted their aisles deep into the airy shadows.

"A little wind stirred their tops, and for a moment, just before the Altrurian began to speak, drew from them an organ-tone that melted delicately away as his powerful voice rose."

The sympathetic reader will feel the fine effect of the adjective "solemn" given to those mountains against the east.

There is not, I believe, a trace of humor in the Altrurian's lecture. Of course the proprieties of literary art forbade its introduction. Indeed, not even Mr. Howells's cleverness could have made the Altrurian humorous without violating the very conception of his character. "Of humor all compact," I should hardly therefore have come so near pronouncing the book to be. Perhaps, on the contrary, we ought to take it as really meant quite in earnest, to commend, under a mask of pleasantry, the principles and practise of social altruism to the favorable consideration of readers. Mr. Howells may have been a more serious teacher in this book than he would have thought it wise expressly and openly to appear.

Here is one among the many inconsequences, all exquisitely verisimilar (given a woman of that type), which together set off a Mrs. Vervain to the amused imagination of the reader. Her daughter, Florida, a charmingly sweet and loyal daughter, has just told her mother of an unexpected turn in their affairs due to a sudden change of purpose on the part of a third per-

son. Mrs. Vervain exclaims: "Florida, you astonish me! But I am not the least suprised, not the least in the world." This occurs in "A Foregone Conclusion," a story which its title perhaps conspires with its course of narrative to make seem almost a comedy pure. There is in it an element which should impress the reader with a sense of pathos at least, if not of tragedy; but the investing atmosphere of the whole piece tends singularly to defeat any true effect of reality in the fiction. This story belongs in a cycle of tales having their center in Venice, which are sufficiently alike in motive, in cast of character, and in treatment, to be a little monotonous, to come, in short, as near to being tiresome as anything from Mr. Howells's pen could possibly be. A more invariably interesting writer I do not know in any literature—hardly Voltaire, whom, except in this one respect, Mr. Howells does not in the least resemble. His stories all have this peculiarity, they begin to entertain at once, from their very start. I had almost thought of whimsically accounting it perhaps the chief reason why Mr. Howells is not held to be a truly great novelist, that he has no dull pages, especially that he does not elaborate you a *mise en scène* to begin with, which you feel in conscience bound to read, but which you read with sincere lassitude of spirit, sustained only by hopes of something good to follow that depends upon this.

Not seldom Mr. Howells's situations are themselves overpoweringly humorous. But it is in the dialogues, and in the author's comments interspersed, that his humor is always triumphant. It is a constant surprise, until at last you come to expect it from this writer as of course, how completely he commands the

idiom of conception and of expression proper to persons the most diverse in character and in occupation or position. He will introduce you a fellow like Sam Weller, for example—like, but different, for American instead of English—and set him going in an apparently inexhaustible flow of piquant humor and animal spirits, perfectly appropriate for his particular condition; and then shortly have a cultivated man of high breeding indulging in the most subtle and delicate humor imaginable, tinged, very likely, with that “literary color” in which Mr. Howells always delights. By the way, this fondness of his comes out unobtrusively, but most enjoyably, in buried allusions to things literary culled from wide assimilative reading, especially in poetry; as when he says, lightly and brightly, of his Mrs. Makely choosing on an occasion to assume a luminous expression of countenance—for a purpose—“She tricked her beams a little” (Milton’s “Lycidas”); or as when, with characteristic shrewd observation, he speaks of the women, “a large tribe among us,” he says, “who have revolted from domestic care,” and, by becoming lady boarders, have “skillfully unseated the black rider [Horace’s *Post equitem sedet atra Cura*] who remains mounted behind” their husbands; or, yet again, as when in “Literary Friends and Acquaintance,” for final comment on a most unphilosophic petulance of Emerson’s in resentment of a very proper and most respectful editorial question addressed to him by Mr. Howells about a certain contribution of his (Emerson’s) offered to *The Atlantic Monthly*, the reminiscent, with the gentlest humor imaginable of blame, relates that he yielded as far as he could to what was abruptly demanded by the in-

censed illustrious contributor, "*silently grieving that there could be such ire in heavenly minds!*" Of a conscientious minister fronting an unexpected and very unwelcome guest just arrived, Mr. Howells says, "Planting himself adventurously upon the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, he added, '*I'm very glad to see you.*'" Of this same minister, when, feeling remorseful over a fault committed by him, he made it the occasion of a sermon to warn his hearers against doing the like: "He fell into the error of the literary temperament, and *almost felt that he had atoned for his wrongdoing by the force with which he had portrayed it.*" In a like manner of keen insight and gently sarcastic humor, he says, no matter of whom, only a reprobate, "He was so strong in his silent repentance that *he felt like a good man.*" Again: Of a husband, after lapse on his part, assuring his wife that it should never happen again, "In making this promise, he *felt the glow of virtuous performance.*" It required the courage of enviable confidence in his readers for Mr. Howells to say, as he does, finely, with a true poetic touch, of a man rallying by sheer force of will from a state of depression, "After a dreary interval he *plucked a random cheerfulness out of space,* and said," etc. "If Ben doesn't turn out a *philanthropist of the deepest dye* yet, you'll have me to thank for it," exclaims a very worldly-wise sister, of a brother who exhibits alarming symptoms of deterioration in character taking the unhappy direction of philanthropy!

Mr. Howells indulges a very engaging frankness in letting his own addiction to the literary appear over and over again, both in his own person, he speaking as author, and in the person of character after charac-



ter introduced in his fiction. Of a writer who had found an opportunity to administer a portion of his writing to listeners unable decently to escape, Mr. Howells says, "The passage was a long one, and Hughes read it all *with an author's unsparing zest.*" Perhaps no one but a writer, and a writer willing to smile at himself, can fully appreciate the humor of that. Such a writer may try, but he will try in vain, to substitute a better adjective than "unsparing" to express the whole of the rich humorous sense. Kane, in "The World of Chance," is perhaps the best example of the writer made by Mr. Howells to serve this particular humorsome turn of his; but Kane is not alone here in being thus useful. "No man ought to place himself in conditions where he has to deny himself the amenities of life," Ray persisted [he had been blaming an editor who, he thought, had not treated him properly], and he felt that he had made a point and *languaged it well.*" Mr. Howells, with all his modesty and all his well-bred self-restraint, can not help knowing that he is often happily brilliant in a literary way, and he can not help now and then drawing his reader's attention to a display that he has made of this skill. His man Kane is made to say, "If Tolstoy had not become a leader, he would have had a multitude of followers." Mr. Howells then comments: "The perfection of his paradox afforded Kane the highest pleasure. He laughed out his joy in it." Again: "'Nature must meet man half-way.' Kane's eyes kindled with pleasure in his phrase. . . . 'The earth is a dangerous planet; the great question is how to get away from it alive,' and the light in Kane's eyes overspread his face in a smile of deep satisfaction

with his paradox." Ray (after a very highly satisfactory interview about a book manuscript of his) "left his publisher with a light heart *and a pious sense of the divine favor.*"

By the way, Walter Scott, whose prose fiction Mr. Howells seems to have read in course (not a good method, he thinks, of learning to know an author) and seems to have read without due profit—Walter Scott, I recall, from the reading of many years ago, does not scruple to do as Mr. Howells does, that is, praise himself indirectly by praising a character of his—when, of Jeanie Deans's plea to the queen on behalf of her sister, he makes the queen say, "This is eloquence"—which indeed it was, as I remember it, and well worthy of the author's, or of anybody's, praise.

I will let the reader supply from his own sympathetic imagination the setting that would make the following phrases—mingled of humor, of pathos, of wisdom—intelligible and effective: "with a *radiant* deceit"; . . . "viewing the affair in the *heroical abstract*"; . . . "the sense of our impermanent relation to the parental roof comes to us very early in life"; . . . "as the disembodied religion of a far-heard hymn appeals to the solemnity of the listener's soul" (how that makes me remember an occasion, near the old walled town of Annaberg in Saxony, on which, standing far off, I caught, from across a deep-sunk valley, the strains of a requiem sung by a funeral train [of miners, I think] winding their way on foot to burial of the dead!); . . . "with the self-contempt that depraves"; . . . "'Ben was a good baby for sleeping too,' said Mrs. Halleck, *retrospectively*

*emulous*”; . . . an old gentleman chatted with Cornelia, “apparently in the fatuity that if he talked trivially to her he would be the same as a young man”; . . . “as men grow old or infirm they fall into subjection to their womankind; their rude wills yield in the suppler insistence of the feminine purpose”; . . . “a mature Yankee single woman, of *confirmed self-respect*”; . . . “our own fate always appears to us unaccomplished, a thing for the distant future to fulfil”; . . . “there is no condition of life that is wholly acceptable, but none that is not tolerable when once it establishes itself” (which recalls La Rochefoucauld’s, “We are never so happy or so unhappy as we think”); . . . “‘Is Mr. Bolton at home?’ ‘Yes, he is,’ said Mrs. Bolton, *with the effect of not intending to deny it*”; . . . “putting on a fine, patronizing, gentleman-of-the-old-school smile”; . . . “perhaps the woman nature craves this [namely, “intelligence”] as much as it is supposed to crave sympathy—*perhaps the two are finally one*” (which might be taken as almost a free version of the French saying, *Tout comprendre c’est tout pardonner*); . . . Mrs. Bolton (cf. “Mrs. Poyser”) “plunging her fists into the dough and beginning to *work a contempt for her husband’s optimism into it*”; . . . “the indecorum of suggesting in words the commonplaces of the theater and of art”; . . . “a man who is able to walk round quite ruthlessly on the feelings of others often has very tender feelings of his own, easily lacerated, and eagerly responsive to the caresses of compassion”; . . . of a man who has “risen”—“if he is not an ignoble spirit, the ties of affection remain unweakened”; . . . “abruptly took his leave as one does when he thinks

he has made a good point"; . . . "*trying with the ineffectiveness of a large woman, to pout*"; . . . "Sewall [Mr. Howells's minister] smiled to think how much easier it was to make one's peace with one's God than with one's wife."

There is no end to Mr. Howells's happy strokes of humor, but there must be an end to my citations from among them, and I stay my hand. His counsels of wisdom are many, but they are generally so introduced as to make difficult their separation from context. They spring up, where we find them, naturally related to the character, or the situation, in the narrative. The fact that the novelist's views are thus introduced in fiction makes fiction the tremendous instrument that it is of education and influence. It is matter of just congratulation that on the whole Mr. Howells's educative influence is so salutary. For all that his propensity to the lightness of humor is so strong and so liberally indulged, he writes always, as Anthony Trollope wrote, under the control of conscience. Mr. Howells's is not a Puritan conscience; it is even far from being such. If I frankly say that I think it a little too far from that mark, that will only be confessing myself to be somewhat more nearly Puritan than he. It is perhaps this personal difference—of temperament, shall I say?—from him that makes me think, or feel rather, that if Mr. Howells's moral earnestness had been deeper, more compelling than it is, he would have achieved still greater things than he has done.



## VII

“ENTRANCING,” I suffered myself to call Mr. Howells’s volume “Literary Friends and Acquaintance,” and truly entrancing it is to me in so large part that I did not feel at the moment like qualifying my praise with hint of any exception. But now I feel bound to say that there are passages in it that I should not think of calling entrancing. Indeed, it has some things in it that I am Puritan enough—in taste—to regret seeing there. One of these occurs in a paper which deserves perhaps to be considered the very best in the volume—the one he entitles “Studies of Lowell.” This is a beautiful poem in prose, an affectionate In Memoriam dedicated to the one author whom personally Mr. Howells loved most of all. But is it not a pity that, for the sake of a fuller, a more perfect, realism, he should relate the following incident; and does he not do it with comment made in a manner that goes far in the direction of something overstrained, affected, ungenue? “One day I came in quoting—

Io son, cantava, io son dolce Sirena,  
Che i’ marinai in mezzo al mar dismago.

He stared at me in a rapture with the matchless music and then uttered all his adoration and despair in one word. ‘Damn!’ he said, and no more.” Mr. Howells, in recalling and recording the incident, seems to have felt the necessity of providing some sort of sequel to relieve the effect he had produced. He can not exactly remember, but, “I believe,” he says, “Lowell instantly proposed a walk that day, *as if his study walls with all their vistas into the great literatures*

*cramped his soul liberated to a sense of ineffable beauty of the verse of the sommo poeta.*" I need not call in question the correctness of Mr. Howells's interpretation of the "stare" with which Lowell greeted Dante's lines, heard by him no doubt recited in the happiest vocal rendering from his young friend's lips—an expression of countenance so singularly emphasized as it is with that damnatory monosyllable. But I must submit that "adoration," even qualified by "despair," was not expressed felicitously by "*Damn!*" I can not help regretting that Lowell condescended to so violent and so unfit an irony of "adoration and despair." It is right to add that, on a subsequent page, Mr. Howells has this quasi-apologetic remark, interjected without much relevance to its immediate context, "Lest any weaker brethren should be caused to offend by the restricted oath which I have reported him using in a moment of transport, it may be best to note here that I never heard him use any other imprecation, and this one seldom." I am myself not of the "weaker brethren," in the sense of being the least likely to "be caused to offend" by this regrettable example from Lowell; but I am willing to take my place among the "weaker brethren" in so far as to acknowledge that I am truly sorry to be obliged to associate with Lowell such a breach of esthetic, if not of ethical, propriety. I can say the like as to a similar offense reported by Mr. Howells from Hawthorne. I take it for granted that Mr. Howells himself did not, and that he does not, yield to the temptation of the literary temperament, if indeed the literary temperament involves that temptation, by using "restricted" oaths, even "seldom," in his conversation. But a nice ques-

tion of "unconscious influence" is suggested, and I wonder if it would have been possible for young Howells to remain the victoriously agreeable personality that he certainly must have been, and yet to carry with him and make radiant about him an air such that no one, if a true gentleman, would be inclined to use with him expressions likely to affect him unpleasantly as irreverent. Perhaps it would have been enough to say of this passage that in it Mr. Howells seems to have suffered his fine hero-worshiping instinct to put in abeyance for the moment his faculty, generally so alert and infallible, for judging justly what, on the whole, was decorous and fit.

I hardly know anything in literature more penetratively, more subtly, more sweetly, pathetic than the latter part of Mr. Howells's tribute to Lowell, that part wherein he gives us the portrait of his friend in the posture of one who has at last had to give up being young, and who seems to be saying only, "*Vixi!*"—in a house, his own beloved Elmwood, inhabited by ghosts, the memories of a hopelessly vanished past.

Now that I have given such preeminence among his memorial papers to Mr. Howells's reminiscences of Lowell, I am almost minded to say that his briefer tribute to the memory of George William Curtis surpasses even that. This is indeed a "gem of purest ray serene" wrought into form with the last consummate felicity of faithful and affectionate workmanship. I can hardly refrain from giving it bodily here. "One like himself should praise him," I said and sang, so commencing a memorial sonnet dedicated to Curtis and published in the *Century Magazine* after his death. The "one like himself" has almost appeared in Mr.

Howells, for not even Curtis could surpass the delicacy, the loyalty, the high-bred gentle passion in restraint, with which Mr. Howells has expressed himself about that rare, that beautiful, that exquisite, memory.

There are so many things in Mr. Howells's production that tempt me to prolong my praise by citation that I suppose I must deny myself the pleasure of illuminating my pages with his tribute to Curtis. By the way, in the list of names celebrated with reminiscence and praise in Mr. Howells's "Literary Friends and Acquaintance," there is one remarkable omission, which it is difficult to suppose could have been due to mere inadvertence. The name of Charles Dudley Warner is conspicuous by its absence. The two men were at one and the same time of the staff of regular, quasi-editorial, contributors to *Harper's Magazine*, which seems to make it certain that they knew each other personally. Why the omission? One can not but be tempted to wonder. With the wonder, good taste and good judgment join in bidding us be content, without indulging conjecture. One unwelcome conjecture of reason seems happily forbidden by a frugal allusion occurring in Mr. Howells's contribution to the recent semicentennial number of *The Atlantic Monthly*, in which Warner is named and characterized as "that gentle and fine and quaint Charles Dudley Warner."

### VIII

AND now I am aware that of Mr. Howells's novels as wholes I have said, I have implied, almost nothing. What is justly to be said on this important point? Well, comparing him with the master in fiction by



whom he chiefly swears, I must acknowledge that in the breadth of the canvas that he uses, and in the number and variety of the figures with which he peoples it, as also in the strikingness and power of the situations depicted, Mr. Howells provokes no comparison with Tolstoy. Inimitable, or at least unsurpassable, he is, within his own chosen bounds, but those bounds are contracted. He suffers similarly, measured against the largeness of the handling of Walter Scott. If he had boldly attempted greater things, he apparently might have accomplished greater things. I can not help wishing that he had. There is no denying that an author is to be judged not only by what he has accomplished, but also by what he has attempted—or not. I can not wish that his genius for humor had been less or less compelling. But I can in loyalty wish, and I do in all loyalty wish, that his moral earnestness had been earlier awakened in him, so as to have affected a greater share of his production and affected that share more deeply. He makes a touching confession in that place in which he incidentally, but most modestly, and in its place most appropriately, says, “A new light had then” [the time when is not definitely given, but it must have been when Tolstoy took such strong possession of him]—“a new light had then lately come into my life, by which I saw all things that did not somehow *tell for human brotherhood* dwarfish and ugly”—the italics are mine. There certainly speaks a true moral earnestness. I feel the pulse of this beating irregularly but persistently through all his later writing. Perhaps I should have to except the very latest. His “Between the Dark and the Daylight” seems otiose and

rather idle, I fear. Like everything from Mr. Howells's pen, it is clever, beyond words to tell how clever. Who else is there, who else has there ever been, that out of "airy nothing" could conjure up tales so interesting from start to finish, while yet so insubstantial, elusive, disappointing, unsatisfactory? Do I jealously suspect some deterioration too in style, a deterioration (if present) taking the direction of oversophistication like Henry James's later sad decline from the fine literary art of his earlier work? Just now my attention was arrested by what I italicize in the following from Mr. Howells's contribution to the late semicentennial *Atlantic Monthly*: "I did not well know how to begin these wandering lucubrations—I believe I never used the word before, but it is not too late—and I do not know better how to end them." That set me to wondering whether there was any significance, and if there was some significance, what the significance was, in such an indulgence of literary *négligée* as that singular soliloquizing parenthesis of Mr. Howells's. A strain of gossiping reminiscence from a writer well assured of his acceptance with readers—and with editors!—is not, of course, to be judged strictly as serious literature. But, besides betraying an habitual very alert self-consciousness at work with him when he writes, to govern his choice of words, does his parenthesis of confidence to the public betray also some undue momentary relaxation of that ever-present watchfulness of self which at length comes to preside over everything, even the slightest, permitted to flow from the practised writer's pen? A stealing upon Mr. Howells of old age's garrulity is not to be suspected. Was it simply one little innocent escape of "too much,"

in the easy egoism that charms in such writing as that in which this occurs? Probably that was all. I trust there was no final impatience indicated of the care and self-denial on the author's part which must to the very end continue to go into the production of high literature. But I confess that in reading "Between the Dark and the Daylight," as also in reading "Fennel and Rue," I was conscious of some uneasy apprehension, which I immediately dismissed, that Mr. Howells had exhausted his vein in fiction and was to produce nothing more of value comparable to the value of what he has already produced. *Absit omen!* and indeed I have said this as a kind of instinctive futile motion to forestall and estop such an eventuality.

For my own satisfaction in the reading, I do not seriously miss, what nevertheless I doubt not the average novel-reader misses, in Mr. Howells's fiction; that is, the excitement of things happening all the time, and especially the excitement of tantalized suspense and of wonder how things are going to turn out. The absence of great catastrophe is a note of difference in Mr. Howells's handling from the handling of popular novelists in general. Once, and as far as I remember, once only, Mr. Howells has tried his hand, not at a whole novel, but at an important episode, of romantic invention involving peril and escape, somewhat resembling what Robert Louis Stevenson gives us in "Treasure Island." This is in "A Woman's Reason," consisting of that part in which the hero of the story is cast away in shipwreck, and goes through vicissitudes of danger and of hardship issuing in happy escape and safety at last. Here, of course, Mr. Howells had to draw on his little-assisted imagination,

and on books of travel and description, for his material in "local color," instead of drawing on his own personal observation and careful studying of conditions, as has been the general, indeed, elsewhere I believe the invariable, method pursued by him in his fiction. This necessarily loses for us something of the sense of reality with which generally we can not help reading Mr. Howells. I was reminded of "Enoch Arden" in reading the descriptions furnished by the novelist of the far Pacific scene of the shipwreck and exile; there was a touch too of the "Swiss Family Robinson" in the various inventive expedients resorted to by the stranded hero for subsistence and for such modified comfort as, under the conditions of the case, ingenuity could make possible. On the whole, this experiment of Mr. Howells's in adventures of romanticism may be pronounced fairly successful; still it is felt somewhat as a *tour de force* on his part which he has done well not to repeat.

By the way, it is somewhat surprising to find the vigilant realism of this novelist nodding enough at one point to let the following slip on his part betray him as not a historian, which ostensibly he is, in the narrative, but a fictionist: "What inner change, if any, it wrought [in the Marcia of "A Modern Instance"] is one of those facts which fiction must seek in vain to disclose." Besides breaking absolutely the illusion of reality which it was the aim of his art to create and maintain, this inadvertence of Mr. Howells's raises at once in the mind of the thoughtful reader the question, "Why, pray, since the novelist has been speaking throughout the story as one who knew, like the Omniscient Himself, all that passed in the secret of



the souls of his characters—why, pray, should he *not* know, and knowing *disclose*, whether any ‘inner change’ took place in Marcia, and if some inner change did take place, then also what the inner change was?”

Balzac, the great realist, so called, in fiction, whom it is now the fashion to praise unboundedly, commits the like error, but he does it by no means inadvertently, when, in beginning his novel “The Search for the Absolute,” he prefaces a characteristic detailed description of his with this curious remark:

“Before describing this house, it may be well, in the interest of other writers, to explain the necessity for such didactic preliminaries, since they have raised a protest from certain ignorant and voracious readers who want emotions without undergoing the generating process, the flower without the seed, the child without gestation. Is Art supposed to have higher powers than Nature?”

Balzac’s fault is far worse than Mr. Howells’s, not only because deliberately and purposely committed, and committed with absurd ostentation, but also because committed at the start of an ostensible history, and not, like Mr. Howells’s, stealing in at the conclusion of one.

## IX

WHAT novel of Mr. Howells’s is his greatest? The answer to this question will necessarily be to a great extent a matter of the personal equation in the one who gives the answer. “The Rise of Silas Lapham”? “The Quality of Mercy”? “A Hazard of New Fortunes”? “A Modern Instance”? This last presents, in Bartley Hubbard, a character as likely as any of Mr. Howells’s creations, to continue a kind of substan-

tive existence in the memory and imagination of the reader, and in after literary allusion. "A Modern Instance" also contains a very memorable passage of real eloquence, in the address made by Marcia's father to the jury that was virtually trying her unfaithful husband. This address shows remarkably Mr. Howells's buoyant capacity to rise to any occasion that his plot of narrative might present. It makes one wish that his art had furnished him more frequent serious occasions for escaping from the rather narrow and bounded life that he has chosen chiefly to represent into a realm in which there was room, around and above, for him to expand in, to his true dimensions, and to rise in, to the height of which he tantalizingly seems sometimes at least to be capable. One of Mr. Howells's most original characters, perhaps his most original of all, is Charmian in "The Coast of Bohemia." She is incalculable and piquant to a degree. I should be inclined to name one of his earlier and lighter books, "A Chance Acquaintance," as perhaps the best specimen, not certainly of his creative work in fiction, but of his style of expression. As I remember it, it seems to me the most carefully, most affectionately, finished in form of all Mr. Howells's productions. His cleverness rejoices in it to the very last exquisite perfection of facility and felicity in diction and in phrase. As to substance, it occupies a place about midway between the lightness of his comedy confessed, on the one hand, and the gravity of his most serious fiction, on the other.

The interval between these two extremes is traversed by a chain of performances in which, measuring from the latter, the serious, extreme, you feel the earnest motive yielding more and more to the humorous, until

in the result you seem to have been dealing with a fairly continuous series of fictions almost insensibly shading off from high purpose at the summit, through various descending degrees of lightness, into open comedy and at last into farce. In general, it may be said that Mr. Howells tends not to take his characters, especially his women, seriously enough.

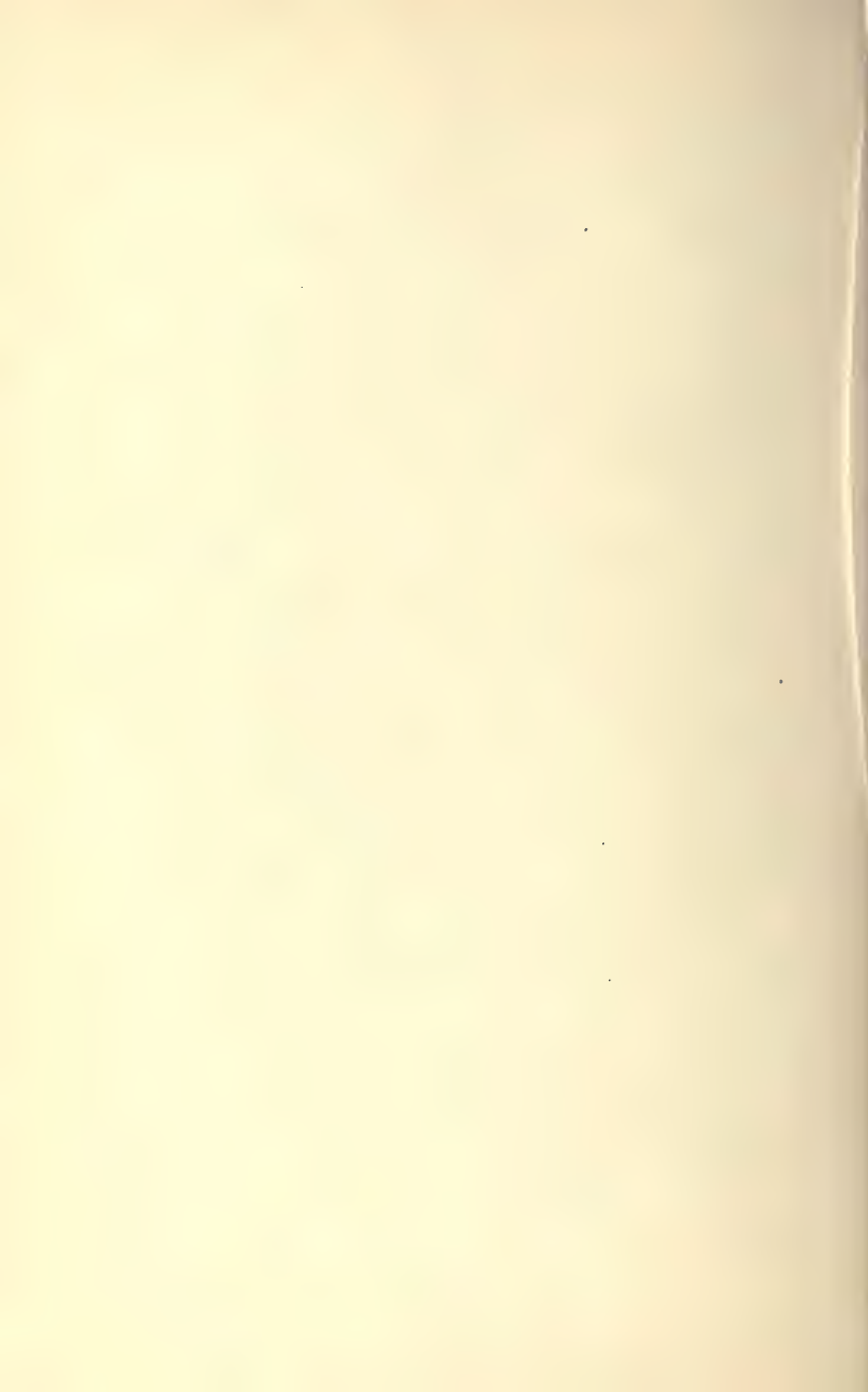
I am not reviewing Mr. Howells's fiction, and so I put myself under no obligation to speak of his novels in detail; I am not dealing with him as a novelist, but as a writer. As a novelist, I am obliged to account him less great than in my opinion he deserves to be accounted as a writer. And, to repeat my sentence upon him, neither as novelist nor as writer has he quite achieved the greatness that lay within the reach of his powers. That is to say, he is greater than his work. Still he is a great writer, judged only by what he has written.

I had reached this point in preparation of the present paper, when, as in duty bound, I paused to read his latest work, his "Fennel and Rue." (Already, while I am busy with the proofs for this volume, "Fennel and Rue" ceases to be Mr. Howells's "latest" work. "Roman Holidays" is announced from his pen. His practise has so largely been to entitle his novels by phrases from well-known poems, that one instinctively thinks of Byron's "Butchered to make a Roman holiday"—only, however, to be quite sure that the coincidence in this case is one that would have deterred, rather than attracted, the author's choice of name for his new book.) "Fennel and Rue" is, on its surface, from its look and from its sound, a taking title, but, except that fact, I can think of no rea-

son for its having been chosen. It names a very slight story, the hundred-odd pages of which, the publishers, by the use of very thick paper, have swollen to the bulk of a book that should seem to justify fixing on it the price of a good-sized volume. It could not be Mr. Howells's work without containing many touches of deft craftsmanship and many lights of his inexhaustible humor. But, despite these, it is on the whole a thing of little worth. It reads as if the author might have taken at random from among the elements of a dozen other of his books, and by simply shuffling them produced them over again in a form in which they have nothing new or different, except the form—and the form itself seems hardly new or different. The result to one reader and admirer of Mr. Howells is to excite a most respectful wish that the author would reserve himself for the production of a serious work greater than any he has hitherto achieved, to be a perpetual witness to the real elevation and power of his genius. If he would thus check his wonderful facility and fecundity, and put force upon himself to produce something illustrating a more arduous and more laborious excellence of art, it would be to the profit of his best readers and surely it would be to the profit of his own eventual fame.

In the supposed default of some such crowning fruit from his pen, the final sentence on Mr. Howells appears to me likely to be in effect this: He was a clever writer, an extraordinarily clever writer, whose cleverness did not prevent his being also a great writer, although it did perhaps prevent his becoming as great a writer as he seemed, both intellectually and morally, constituted to be.





MATTHEW ARNOLD AS CRITIC



## MATTHEW ARNOLD AS CRITIC

### I

MATTHEW ARNOLD has enjoyed a long tenure of something very much like authority as critic, and his claim to high rank as poet, although by no means generally—that is, popularly—acknowledged, has yet a measure of support among men of culture that fairly challenges our respect, if it does not command our concurrence. I myself think that, both as critic and as poet, Arnold has been greatly overrated. His critical influence accordingly is greater than it ought to be, and it is, I hold, partly not a good influence—this, whether exerted as that of a model in style, or exerted as that of a master in criticism. My object in the present paper is to give the grounds of this my dissenting opinion. In short, I purpose doing by Arnold himself what he had it in mind to do by others, when, in 1860, he wrote as follows in one of his (generally very engaging) family letters: “Gradually I mean to say boldly the truth about a great many English celebrities and begin with Ruskin in these lectures on Homer.”

Denied the recognition for which he hoped, much more the acclamation which would have heartened him to pursue a predominantly, if not an exclusively, poetic career, Arnold, after his early ventures in verse,



turned his attention to criticism. His literary product in prose has been mainly critical—if not always critical in form, always critical at least in effect. His “Literature and Dogma,” his “St. Paul and Protestantism,” were conceived and were written as essays in criticism, no less truly than were his “Essays in Criticism,” expressly so named. His quality as critic appears therefore in those and other like works of his, displayed no less clearly than that quality is displayed in his direct dealings with literature. It thus comes to pass that the intelligence to understand, and therewith the candor and the disinterestedness to understand, the sanity, the balance, of mind to form right judgments—these necessary faculties in the true critic’s equipment—were constantly put to the test in everything, or in almost everything, that Arnold wrote in prose. Since, according to Arnold, the business of poetry itself is criticism, “criticism of life,” the remark just made about his prose production might almost equally well be made also about his production in verse.

They will seem to many bold questions to ask, but, I ask: Was Arnold’s endowment of intelligence, of candor, of disinterestedness, was his endowment of sobriety, of mental poise, such as to equip him adequately for the office of critic? He was sincerely interested in literature and in ideas. His life was in the things of the spirit. That was much. That drew him to criticism—to criticism, as he somewhat capriciously defined criticism, namely, as a “disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.” This definition, very idiosyncratic to say the least, Arnold felt to be extremely im-

portant. He held to it strongly. "I am bound by my own definition of criticism," he says, repeating his definition with the emphasis of italics. ("Essays in Criticism," Am. ed., p. 36.) In the preface to "Literature and Dogma," Arnold gives almost exactly the same definition to "culture"—thus evidencing lack of good thinking on his part. Again, "letters" ("Literature and Dogma," p. 8) is given this same much-worked "definition." We thus have three different things confused and identified one with another by the same definition applied to them all alike.

Still, Arnold's formula, whether good or not as a definition of criticism, at any rate expresses an admirable aim, an aim that it would be well for us all to adopt and to keep steadily in mind. It is nothing very new indeed, in substance of meaning, but it provides a fresh statement for the self-evidently sound idea that we ought to seek truth and to communicate truth when we find it. In fact, it very properly goes a little way beyond that, for it commends an active commerce in mere tentatives of seeking, since it names not only the best that is "known," but also the best that is "thought." I should not myself give the title "criticism" to this complex intellectual activity. Pursuit and dissemination of truth would, I think, entitle it better. It involves, of course, exercise of criticism, but it involves much more than that. Let Arnold, however, for the moment have his peculiar definition, and let us see how he himself goes about to learn and spread abroad the best that is known and thought in the world.

Even if the word "criticism" be taken in the sense which Arnold gives to it, still the intelligence to un-

derstand, and therewith the candor and the disinterestedness to understand, are evidently qualifications which, as no one will deny, must belong in large measure to the good critic. Did Arnold possess in large measure these qualifications?

## II

LET us at once try him by a palmary instance. He quotes Burke—in manner and to effect that will presently appear; but first I give the sentence with which Arnold introduces his quotation:

“At the very end of his fierce struggle with the French Revolution, after all his invectives against its false pretensions, hollowness, and madness, with his sincere conviction of its mischievousness, he can close a memorandum on the best means of combating it, some of the last pages he ever wrote—the ‘Thoughts on French Affairs,’ in December, 1791—with these striking words.”

It is not careful criticism on Arnold’s part incidentally thus to designate Burke’s paper, entitled “Thoughts on French Affairs,” as a “memorandum on the best means of combating” the French Revolution; the fact being that Burke expressly abstains from proposing practical measures, or discussing practical measures, to be used against what he so passionately deplored. He confines himself strictly to stating the case. Also, it is not carefully critical for Arnold to call Burke’s “Thoughts on French Affairs” “some of the last pages he ever wrote.” Burke lived six or seven years after writing his “Thoughts on French Affairs,” and during this interval he wrote profusely, and as heatedly as ever, in the same sense, on the

same subject—his “Letters on a Regicide Peace” belonging to that period. Here is Arnold’s quotation from Burke—the italics are Arnold’s:

“The evil is stated, in my opinion, as it exists. The remedy must be where power, wisdom, and information, I hope, are more united with good intentions than they can be with me. I have done with this subject, I believe, forever. It has given me many anxious moments for the last two years. *If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it; the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope, will forward it; and then they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate.*”

Arnold follows this quotation from Burke with remarks, soon to be shown, which, implying a certain interpretation of Burke’s language, express a certain appreciation of the spirit in Burke that, as Arnold supposed, inspired the language. A twofold question is suggested: First, does Arnold understand Burke correctly? Second, granted that he understands Burke correctly, does he set a proper value on Burke’s sentiment and his attitude of mind? Both these two questions bear very directly and very seriously on Arnold’s qualification as critic.

It must be admitted that Burke’s language is not so entirely clear as were to be desired. It partakes of that somewhat vague, somewhat elusive, character which naturally attaches to what is dictated, and not written, *propria manu*, by the author. It has, indeed, much the appearance of being a mere tentative, provisional expression, meant by the writer to serve as reminder to himself of what might later be cleared



and expanded in a new and additional topic of argument on the theme which so usurped his mind and his heart. The interpretation, therefore, is not perfectly easy, not instantaneously unquestionable. The critic accordingly who deals with it is put by it excellently to the test. Did Burke, in the passage quoted, as Arnold assumes was the case, dismiss the subject—namely, the French Revolution—on which he had been long and almost fanatically engaged, in argument and declamation directed *against* that portentous movement—did Burke dismiss his subject at last with a half-veiled admission that he may have been wrong all the while? Or did Burke, on the other hand, wearily and despondently turning away from his contention, bethink himself nevertheless, in farewell of his subject, to throw out one more consideration in support of the views that he had long so vehemently, and with such universal European *éclat*, maintained?

For my own part, I am convinced that Arnold completely misunderstood Burke in this place, and interpreted him in a sense exactly contrary to his true meaning. What, in my opinion, Burke meant was, that the French Revolution, with its violence and its impudently aggressive propagandism, had no character to commend it as a movement in rational, beneficent progress. It was as if he had said: When a great fundamental and general change likely to be permanent is destined to take place in human affairs, it will find men's minds prepared for it, the current of thought and opinion will have taken a direction in favor of it, it will seem like a thing ordained and necessary, to resist it will be like resisting divine Providence, only the perverse and obstinate will set

themselves in futile array against it. Such conditions do not exist in the case of this French Revolution. I counsel therefore resistance to it and to its leveling principles.

If, to the contrary of this, Arnold is right in his interpretation of Burke, consider what we have presented to us: We have Burke pointing out, with labor and with passion, what he conceives to be the dangerous and destructive political tendencies let loose by the French Revolution—this, through many pages of vehement diatribe—and then, at the close of his indictment, after soberly reaffirming all that he has previously said, with the words, “The evil is stated, in my opinion, as it exists,” abruptly then proceeding to unsay all at a stroke, and to write indirectly a quasi-recantation of the doctrines he has taught. The idea, I confess, seems to me impossible. If the question of Burke’s meaning were not otherwise decisively settled in the sense opposite to that given it by Arnold, the turn of the closing sentence would, I think, decisively settle it in that sense. Can it be conceived that Burke, in “return upon himself,” would use the language he does in that sentence, would, by the obscurest implication even, virtually describe himself as perhaps “perverse and obstinate”? There is nothing in Burke’s character—nothing, I venture to say, in the whole tract of his writing—to render it credible.

Arnold seems to have been wrong historically in depicting the conditions that surrounded Burke at the moment of his supposed “return upon himself.” To enhance Burke’s merit in this supposed “return” of his, Arnold represents him as environed with a din of blatant outcry against the French Revolution. The

fact is, I believe, that until Burke himself partly turned the tide of British opinion and feeling, the predominant popular sentiment was sympathetic, and not hostile, toward what was going on in France. John Morley so represents it. If Burke really was in the midst of a tempest such as Arnold describes, of antagonism to the French Revolution, then, interpreting Burke as he did, Arnold might have made his praise rhetorically much stronger by saying, A tempest that Burke had himself raised.

But it is time I show the *ipsissima verba* of Arnold's praise of Burke:

"That return of Burke upon himself has always seemed to me one of the finest things in English literature, or, indeed, in any literature. That is what I call living by ideas; when one side of a question has long had your earnest support, when all your feelings are engaged, when you hear all around you no language but one, when your party talks this language like a steam-engine and can imagine no other—still to be able to think, still to be irresistibly carried, if so it be, by the current of thought to the opposite side of the question, and, like Balaam, to be unable to speak anything but what the Lord has put in your mouth. I know nothing more striking, and I must add that I know nothing more un-English."

Burke had a good right to do what was "un-English"—though in this case he did not, as Arnold supposed that he did, exercise that right—for he was an Irishman.

That effusion of eulogy on Arnold's part had its occasion, I hold, in a total misapprehension of his author's meaning. But, granted that the reverse is true, granted that Arnold understood Burke right, still, was the eulogy judiciously—that is, in the spirit of sound criticism—bestowed? If Burke really had a

misgiving that he was wrong in his contention, that he had been wrong all the time, that therefore he was wrong still, when just before he said, "The evil is stated, in my opinion, as it exists," then was it, I ask, an adequate acknowledgment that he made of so very serious a possible error? Did it deserve Arnold's enthusiastic praise? In my opinion, the present is a rather important case in which both interpretative faculty and faculty to judge justly failed with Arnold. In both these two very vital respects he showed himself here not a good critic.

By the way, the undeniably abrupt manner in which the quoted expressions from Burke are introduced by him at the end of his "Thoughts on French Affairs," their apparent lack of proper relation to the context in which they stand, suggests what is perhaps a material consideration, namely, the fact that this essay was not published until after the writer's death, although written six or seven years earlier. There is reason to believe that it was submitted by Burke (in manuscript probably) for the consideration of the government. It seems to me likely that, if Burke had himself published his essay, it would not have appeared closing in the air, so to speak, as it now does. He would probably have drawn out into plain expression the conclusion which, as the case stands, is left simply implied. He would have said something to this purport: Great changes in human affairs do undoubtedly occur; but they come gradually; they are led up to through successive stages of preparation; men's minds are insensibly brought into a state of readiness to welcome them; they do not come with shock, with convulsion; they do not come forced upon society by im-



udent methods of propagandism; in short, they are phenomena that the French Revolution does not in the least resemble. This movement accordingly is to me hateful; it is evil and only evil; it is to be implacably resisted. How? That is a question not for me to answer. I have done my duty when I have shown the necessity of resistance. That duty I have now fully discharged. I do not expect ever to return to this subject. (But Burke did return to the subject.)

If Arnold had begun a little farther back in quoting from Burke, he would have included sentences that make against his interpretation—sentences which seem to show that Burke, when composing this paper, felt himself in direct communication with the government rather than with the general public.

“What is to be done?” he asks, and continues:

“It would be presumption in me to do more than to make a case. Many things occur [many resisting, repressive expedients, that is to say, which might be adopted]. But as they, like all political measures, depend on disposition, temper, means, and external circumstances, for all their effect, not being well assured of those, I do not know how to let loose any speculations of mine on the subject. The evil is stated,” etc.

Here Burke appears importunately urging upon the attention of the government the vital importance of taking active practical measures against a great and threatening evil, which, however, according to Arnold, he, at the same time, with admirable “return upon himself,” advises the government may after all exist only in his own “perverse and obstinate” distempered imagination! And Arnold exclaims, “That return of Burke upon himself has always seemed to me one of the finest things in English literature, or, indeed, in

any literature"! If Arnold were still living, I should feel like asking *him* to make a return upon himself, and at least reconsider, if he did not now decisively reject, his interpretation of Burke, and therewith his consequent dithyrambics of eulogy—this, notwithstanding that, having committed himself in print, he has allowed all his feelings to become engaged, and notwithstanding that, in the enjoyment of his vogue as authority, he hears all around him no language but one.

### III

I HAVE devoted what may seem a disproportionate amount of attention to this one passage of Arnold's criticism, because I have reason to believe that, without pretty full discussion of the point involved, those who have formed the habit of submission to Arnold as critic will not easily yield to acknowledge him wrong in so capital a case, and because also the mistake thus proved upon him fairly indicates the really uncritical character that belongs to the whole paper in which it occurs, namely, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." With the sentiment so much insisted upon in this essay of Arnold's, that we ought to aim at seeing things as they really are, I am in the heartiest accord. Arnold performed a true service in his insistence upon this. But when he taught that creative literature could not be produced until critical literature had preceded and prepared the way for it, he was propounding, as I think, the merest barren whimsy imaginable. It is always fairest to let a writer

under criticism speak for himself; here, then, are Arnold's own words:

"Criticism first; a time of true creative activity perhaps—which, as I have said, must inevitably be preceded among us by a time of criticism—hereafter, when criticism has done its work."

To me it seems hardly necessary to do more than simply to submit that statement to any thoughtful mind, in order to have the idiosyncratic, whimsical, character of it reveal itself clearly. That is, it would seem hardly necessary, but that, as matter of fact, there the statement has stood for near half a century in the forefront of Arnold's prose writings, challenging attention and apparently commanding assent—since, in the face of it, the author has held his place of authority in contemporary English criticism. This, indeed, does not adequately state the case that exists, for that particular dictum of Arnold's constitutes the main contention of the leading essay in which it stands, and it may reasonably therefore be supposed to have played an important part in winning for its author the reputation that he enjoys.

It ought, I suppose, in fairness, to be noted that Arnold says "among us," thereby limiting the application of his principle to the British province in the republic of letters. It should further be noted that his title says "at the Present Time." The dictum is accordingly a prescription fitted by the maker of it both to a particular period and to a particular community. What was there, one is accordingly led to ask, in the then current condition of British society that tended to make Arnold think, when he wrote the present essay, that a period of criticism must come in before

successful creative activity in literature could be looked for? When one tries to answer that question out of Arnold's essay, one is much at a loss. The answer, if there is answer supplied by Arnold, is diffused, as it were, through a maze of singularly unanalyzed, very digressive, dissertation. I have looked back and forth again and again, throughout the essay, always in vain, to find a statement that might be quoted here as standing for Arnold's answer to the question why, at that moment, in the then existing state of British society, there must necessarily be a period of criticism, before a period of creation, in literature.

In the lack of any such available statement furnished in Arnold's own words, perhaps it will be most satisfactory to use Arnold's explanation of what he seems to have regarded as a fact, namely, the comparative small worth of the English literature produced in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Narrowing "literature" to "poetry" (apparently unconscious that he is doing this), Arnold says: "The English poetry of the first quarter of this century, with plenty of energy, plenty of creative force, did not know enough." (I refrain from criticizing this with exclamation-point following.) Now bring into connection with that the following: "Byron and Goethe had a great productive power, but Goethe's was nourished by a great critical effort providing the true materials for it and Byron's was not." Byron's productive power may or may not have been "nourished" by the "great critical effort" (*quorum pars magna fuit!*) active everywhere around him, but the "great critical effort" certainly was not wanting.

One gathers then that, in Arnold's opinion prece-



dent criticism was necessary in his own time in order to provide literature (or poetry) with its "true materials." This virtually devolves upon criticism the burden of *originating* ideas, as well as of learning them and setting them in circulation. "A great matter," truly, Arnold makes criticism. Indeed, if now we recall his dictum that poetry itself is criticism, "the criticism of life," there seems nothing left undone for the production of literature, when criticism has done its part. All this strain of doctrine from Arnold seems to me so self-evidently whimsical and futile that I find it difficult to deal with it seriously. Take into consideration the following—which in the essay leads up to the important announcement already quoted that the English poetry of the first quarter of the nineteenth century "did not know enough":

"It has long seemed to me that the burst of creative activity in our literature, through the first quarter of this century, had about it, in fact, something premature; and that from this cause its productions are doomed, most of them, in spite of the sanguine hopes which accompanied and do still accompany them, to prove hardly more lasting than the productions of far less splendid epochs. And this prematureness comes from its having proceeded without having its proper data, without sufficient materials to work with."

I will ask the thoughtful reader to dwell a little on the predication, "had about it, in fact, something premature." Pay attention to the form of expression as well as to the thing expressed. "Had about it!" "Something premature!" There you have style well fitted to the absurdity of the matter. Arnold, then, would have told Byron, Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, all the rest: "No use, gen-

lemen! Don't try to write your poetry yet. You will not succeed. Wait till we critics have got your true materials ready for you. Your literary activity in exercise now will be sure to have about it something premature. In short, you do not know enough." All for lack of fruitful "criticism"! The fact being that, during this period of comparatively futile literary activity, full of "energy," full of "creative force," as it was, yet having "about it something premature," Coleridge was criticizing, as well as producing, literature, in both prose and verse, was importing German criticism from that environment which Arnold thought helped Goethe so, was diffusing ideas by lectures, by monologues (replacing conversation) in clubs and drawing-rooms, monologues famous for their supposed fecundating power, with their Orphic murmur of "sum-mjective" and "om-mjective" and "sum-mject-om-mject," and with their display of wide-ranging knowledge as well as of deep-sounding philosophy; the fact being also that meantime Wordsworth was himself a true critic, that even Shelley criticized to admirable effect, that Byron was strewing his incomparably vital letters (and journals) with sane, incisive criticism, that Jeffrey was producing by quarterly instalments in *The Edinburgh Review* the noblest body of sound, sympathetic, balanced, every way adequate, criticism, literary and other, that perhaps ever has proceeded from any one British brain. And I may name also Thomas Campbell, critic as well as poet, and William Hazlitt, who has lately been coming to his own once more. On the whole, there really should not seem to have been any great famine of criticism to starve the literary producers of that time and to "doom" their

productions "to prove hardly more lasting than the productions of far less splendid epochs"—which is the somewhat halting, and finally somewhat weakening, damnatory sentence that Arnold feels bound to pronounce upon them.

## IV

BUT we must keep in mind Arnold's own individual conception of criticism. "Its business is," Arnold holds, "simply [that adverb is uncritical here, since Arnold has assigned to criticism other functions than the one now to be named] to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and, by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas." Very well, was not criticism, taken in this very peculiar sense, busily at work in the England of the first quarter of the nineteenth century? To go outside the circle of strictly literary activity, did not Jeremy Bentham create a great stir of thought, did he not set in motion a lively current of ideas? And James Mill? These names have lost, indeed, their pristine luster, but they were names to conjure by in their time, and their bearers created a state of ferment in English, and even in European, thought. And there was William Godwin, who, with his voluminous, though now forgotten, production, certainly set ideas in motion. There was Sir James Mackintosh, redoubtable thinker in metaphysics, in ethics, in political philosophy, and withal in philosophical history. Thomas Arnold, father of our critic, deserves mention as a man of ideas. Henry Hallam was at once an historian, and a critic, of literature—"Hallam, than

whom it is impossible to find a saner and more judicious critic," Matthew Arnold himself says. Malthus, Ricardo, Sadler, belong to this period. Surely the opening of the nineteenth century in England was in no sense a stagnant intellectual epoch. Criticism was astir, and there was flowing a lively current of ideas. As there did not lack literary criticism proper, so then there did not lack general intellectual activity, in the England of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, to nourish and support literary creation. There seems to me to be neither historical warrant nor ground in reason and common sense, for Arnold's notion about the "prematureness" of the "burst of creative activity" that marked the early part of the nineteenth century in England.

In truth, to be at once abrupt and brief, with occasional reliefs of genuinely valuable thought, and occasional excellent particular observations in criticism, Arnold's essay seems to me to be mainly a tissue of unsupported critical crotchets from the author, presented in a style of expression well befitting their measure of intrinsic value. In going over it carefully, I am tempted at almost every turn to point out some unverifiable assertion or some really incredible absurdity. "Goethe," Arnold says, "knew life and the world, the poet's necessary subjects, much more comprehensively and thoroughly than Byron. He knew a great deal more of them, and he knew them much more as they really are." Byron died at thirty-six, Goethe reached his eighty-fourth year. Goethe accordingly had upward of half a century more time than Byron had in which to learn his "more" of "life and the world"; it would be strange indeed if he did not at last come to



know more of them than Byron ever did. But was Goethe's production dating within his first thirty-six years marked by a knowledge of "life and the world" superior to the knowledge of "life and the world" displayed in Byron's works? "Goetz von Berlichingen" and "The Sorrows of Werther" make up the sum of the credit to Goethe's account. Compare those two productions with the volume of Byron's literary remains, and judge which writer had acquired at thirty-six more knowledge of life and the world, Goethe or Byron. Goethe, shut up in his petty toy world of Weimar, could not but have a bounded experience accordingly. In one too large part of their experience, both Goethe and Byron knew life and the world as it would have been better for both not to have known them; but Byron moved in a larger sphere of things than ever did Goethe, and sane criticism would, I am sure, never think of contrasting the two men as Arnold's criticism contrasts them. Goethe himself, esteemed by Arnold the very fountain of wisdom, critical and other, pronounced a judgment on Byron's "Manfred," for example, which implies an estimate of the writer different from the estimate implied here by Arnold. "This singularly intellectual poet" Goethe called Byron in a published review of "Manfred," adding, "I can not enough admire his genius."

Arnold was writing in the latter half of the nineteenth century when he bemoaned himself that creative literature was really for the time being out of the question, and would remain so until an interval of good life-giving "criticism" should come in to render it possible. "At some epochs," he laments, "no other creation is possible" than a "poor, starved, fragmen-

*Goethe's judgment*

tary, inadequate creation." He becomes tenderly pathetic, in what the reader feels to be a sort of self-pity on the writer's part, and says:

"In an epoch like those ["the epochs of Æschylus and Shakespeare"] is no doubt the true life of a literature; there is the promised land, toward which criticism can only beckon. That promised land it will not be ours to enter, and we shall die in the wilderness."

During the period in which this lament of Arnold's was getting itself uttered, Tennyson, and Browning, and Mrs. Browning, and William Morris, and Swinburne, in poetry, Macaulay, and Ruskin, and Newman, and Martineau, and Thackeray, in prose, were producing their "poor, starved, fragmentary, inadequate" literary creations—in happy ignorance of how much they were suffering through incapacitating sheer inanition of the mind, due to lack of the necessary precedent "criticism."

This is not a review of Arnold's paper, but only an attempt, by assay of specimens, to indicate its prevailing and essential character. It would be out of the question to assemble within reasonable space exemplifications enough to show adequately the strangely digressive manner in which the discussion is conducted. But notwithstanding the unconsidered, freakish nature of so much that is said in the paper, and notwithstanding the slipshod style in which the paper is written, it must in candor be admitted that it enforces a lesson of great value in insisting on the importance of trying to see things as they really are—this, although, as has been seen, Arnold's own practise illustrates his principle very ill. I can not refrain from expressing my amazement that any intelligent student of litera-

ture and of literary history should possess himself of the notion that, at any moment whatever, criticism must necessarily precede successful creative effort. Creation is often the very best method of criticism. Cowper did more toward rectifying public taste, and bringing literary production back to nature, by simply writing his poetry, than he, or than any one perhaps, could have done by a course of criticism. And in general it may be laid down as unquestionable common sense in the matter that there is no law of relative priority in time as between criticism and creation. The two functions most naturally and most fruitfully proceed at the same time and together. This is true both for any individual producer of literature, and for the literary guild of any time or of any place taken as a body. No author but criticizes himself as he produces, and no author but would be the better for sound reciprocal criticism exchanged between himself and his fellows. Obviously, if there were any law of priority in time, as between creation and criticism, that law would be precisely the opposite of Arnold's contention. Creation would have to precede criticism in order to furnish criticism with material to work upon. Intellectual activity, of whatever sort, having a worthy aim—that is what is needed, what is always needed, what is needed everywhere. Create or criticize, whichever you can do better; or create *and* criticize, if perchance you can do both—as probably you can if you can do either.

## V

ARNOLD'S second essay, "The Literary Influence of Academies," is, as to its main proposal, of critical whimsy all compact; it contains, however, some particular critical appreciations that have value. Its main drift is to show what might be accomplished by an institution in Great Britain modeled somewhat after the fashion of the famous French Academy, to establish better standards of taste and judgment, and so of production, in literature. He would eliminate provincialism, and as for literature in prose, he would have "prose of the center"; that is, prose regulated, in point of matter and in point of style, by the influence of an "academy" constituting a center of reference for all questions of what ought to be, and what ought not, in literature. He cites various examples from English literature of things that, some of them in thought, and some in expression, err from that standard of excellence which he thinks an academy might establish and bring into general acceptance. Still, it must be recognized that he does not quite commit himself in favor of actually establishing an academy in Great Britain; he limits himself to showing what good such an academy might do.

Arnold certainly points out things in some admired, and justly admired, English writers that are the reverse of admirable; but in doing this he seems to me now and again to expose himself to the very same criticisms that he applies to those writers. He adduces examples of writing from Burke, for instance, which assuredly are open to just criticism; Arnold's



criticism of them, however—implied, rather than openly expressed—is not considerate enough to be quite just; but why did he not bethink himself that, if there had existed a British academy in Burke's time, Burke himself would infallibly have been a leading spirit in it, and from what member or members, pray, would have come the corrective influence to chasten Burke's coarsenesses and extravagances into the chaste and temperate elegance so much to be desired? Dr. Johnson, Arnold no doubt would agree, was wanting in that Attic simplicity which is the "bright consummate flower" of ideal perfection in style; but Dr. Johnson also, with Burke, would of course have been a leader, if he would not have insisted upon being *the* leader, in the British academy, and how then would said academy have applied its discipline to Dr. Johnson? In fact, that famous "Club" constituted a kind of virtual academy, with Goldsmith in it, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, setting both Burke and Johnson an example of style as near the ideal standard of ease, simplicity, urbanity, measure, as could at any time be hoped for from the influence of any academy. Did the French Academy keep Victor Hugo within the bounds of the truly classic in style? Did he not, in the face of the Academy, put himself at the head of a revolutionary band who had it for their sworn purpose to flout academical rules and make themselves free to all possible excesses in style?

If there had been a British academy in Arnold's own time, he himself could hardly have failed to be one of its ornaments. So, too, supposably, would have been Ruskin, whom Arnold criticizes; likewise Kinglake, whom Arnold criticizes. Would these wri-

ters under the influence of the academy have written so differently as to have escaped Arnold's criticism? Would Arnold himself, under that same influence, have avoided some certain lapses of his own into faults such as he blames in others? In his essay on "The Function of Criticism," he has the amenity of alluding to two periodicals of the time as respectively "the High-Church rhinoceros and the Evangelical hyena." Elsewhere he uses metaphorical language of an order decidedly striking rather than choice, and speaks of "smelling a rat" ("Archdeacon Denison will still smell a rat in them."—"Literature and Dogma," Chapter II). Would the influence of an academy in which the writer himself was a zealously active member have kept Arnold from these breaches of decorum? Would the same influence have kept him from calling our American Henry Ward Becher "a heated barbarian"? Would it have kept him from affronting half of the whole British community, a very serious half, by using, concerning their conscientiously-held attitude in religion, such language as the following: "Dissent, as a religious movement of our day, would be almost droll, if it were not, from the tempers and actions it excites, so extremely irreligious"?

Arnold parallels with a very manneristic passage—one of those "So have I seen" passages that South irreverently ridiculed—from Jeremy Taylor, that "Shakespeare of divines" as he has been called (with the "Edmund Spenser of divines" for an alternative title), a passage from Bossuet, in order to point the contrast between them, as respects style—a contrast sufficiently marked certainly, and all in favor of Bossuet. The implication is that Bossuet's superiority

was due to the influence of the French Academy, Bishop Taylor having enjoyed no such advantage. Just what measure of influence from the then recently organized French Academy was exerted in his time upon Bossuet, we do not know; but we do know that he came early under the excellent influence of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, no doubt with good result to his standard and his ambition in style. Arnold points out that Bishop Taylor and the "Eagle of Meaux," as Bossuet came to be admiringly called, were contemporaries, as if that fact was material, which I do not think it is. French prose style was earlier in forming than English prose style, a circumstance favoring Bossuet in comparison with Taylor. The passage from Taylor had a funeral occasion; it occurs in a discourse commemorating the virtues of Lady Carberry, lamented wife to the Earl of Carberry, Taylor's patron; the passage from Bossuet occurred in a discourse on the apostle Paul. The resemblance of the two occasions was of the slightest; the two passages accordingly were not suitable for comparison. It shows in Arnold a lack of true critical delicacy that he should have brought them together for comparison as he did. But the point wherein Arnold's critical sanity most fails here is in assuming that the influence of an academy made the difference that exists in favor of Bossuet. The real source of the difference in style is the difference in genius between the two men. I show the two contrasted passages. Here is Bishop Taylor's somewhat fantastical indulgence of fancy:

"So have I seen a river, deep and smooth, passing with a still foot and a sober face, and paying to the *fiscus*, the great exchequer of the sea, a tribute large and full; and hard by it,

a little brook, skipping and making a noise upon its unequal and neighbor bottom; and after all its talking and bragged motion, it paid to its common audit no more than the revenues of a little cloud or a contemptible vessel; so have I sometimes compared the issues of her religion to the solemnities and famed outsides of another's piety."

Here is Bossuet on the apostle Paul; Arnold gives the passage in French; I turn it into English, not staying to point out the mistaken exegesis of certain important expressions from Paul (which, however, makes Arnold's choice of show-extract less happy), implied at the start of Bossuet's rhetoric:

"Il ira, cet ignorant dans l'art de bien dire, avec cette locution rude, avec cette phrase qui sent l'étranger, il ira en cette Grèce polie, la mère des philosophes et des orateurs; et malgré la résistance du monde, il y établira plus d'Églises que Platon n'y a gagné de disciples par cette éloquence qu'on a crue divine."

This may be Englished as follows:

"He will go, that man unversed in the art of elegant speech, with that rude elocution, with that turn of phrase betokening the foreigner, he will go into that polished Greece, the mother of philosophers and of orators; and, despite the opposition of the world, he will found there more churches than Plato there gained disciples by that eloquence supposed to be divine."

For my own part, I am free to say I do not think this passage from Bossuet is beyond criticism, whether regarded in point of form or regarded in point of substance. Some influence, academic or other, should have led Bossuet to doubt whether he knew well enough either the number of the churches founded in Greece by Paul, or the number of the disciples gained there by Plato, to be justified in his rhetorical flourish of comparison. If Arnold had been a more vigilant or



a better-accomplished critic, he would have bethought himself of these things, and have made a different choice of extract from his French author to show, for illustration of the happy influence of academies on literature.

Arnold might have instituted a comparison between a passage from Bossuet and a passage from an English pulpit orator other than Taylor, which would have had more points of fitness to commend it. Take this from Bossuet; it occurs in a funeral discourse pronounced by him on the Princess Henrietta of England:

“Que ce tombeau nous convainque de notre néant, pourvu que cet autel ou l’on offre tous les jours pour nous une victime d’un si grand prix nous apprenne en même temps notre dignité: la princesse que nous pleurons sera un témoin fidèle de l’un et de l’autre. Voyons ce qu’une mort soudaine lui a ravi; voyons ce qu’une sainte mort lui a donné. Ainsi nous apprendrons à mépriser ce qu’elle a embrassé avec tant d’ardeur, lorsque son âme, épurée de tous les sentiments de la terre, et pleine du ciel, où elle touchait, a vu la lumière toute manifeste. Voilà les vérités que j’ai à traiter, et que j’ai crues dignes d’être proposées à un si grand prince, et à la plus illustre assemblée de l’univers.”

For the convenience of readers to whom it may prove convenient, I show the passage in English:

“Let this tomb convince us of our nothingness, provided that this altar, where is daily offered for us a Victim of price so great, teach us at the same time our dignity. The princess whom we weep shall be a faithful witness, both of the one and of the other. Let us survey that which a sudden death has taken away from her; let us survey that which a holy death has bestowed upon her. Thus shall we learn to despise that which she quitted without regret, in order to attach all our regard to that which she embraced with so much ardor, when her soul, purified from all earthly sentiments, full of the heaven on whose

border she touched, saw the light completely revealed. Such are the truths which I have to treat, and which I have deemed worthy to be proposed to so great a prince and to the most illustrious assembly in the world."

Now for parallel to that, take this from an English pulpit orator; the occasion is strikingly similar to the occasion of Bossuet's discourse. The extract is from a sermon on the death of Princess Charlotte of Wales:

"Born to inherit the most illustrious monarchy in the world and united at an early period to the object of her choice, whose virtues amply justified her preference, she enjoyed (what is not always the privilege of that rank) the highest connubial felicity, and had the prospect of combining all the tranquil enjoyments of private life with the splendor of a royal station. . . . It is no reflection on this amiable princess to suppose that in her early dawn, with the dew of her youth so fresh upon her, she anticipated a long series of years, and expected to be led through successive scenes of enchantment, rising above each other in fascination and beauty. It is natural to suppose she identified herself with this great nation which she was born to govern; and that, while she contemplated its preeminent luster, in arts and in arms, its commerce encircling the globe, its colonies diffused throughout both hemispheres, and the beneficial effects of its institutions extending to the whole earth, she considered them as so many component parts of her grandeur. . . . Alas! these delightful visions are fled; and what do we behold in their room but the funeral-pall and shroud, a palace in mourning, a nation in tears, and the shadow of death settled over both like a cloud."

The parallel just now presented is between two men not dissimilar in genius and in culture, treating of very similar subjects, on very similar occasions. One was a Frenchman, producing under the shadow of the French Academy; the other was an Englishman with no academy near to exert its corrective influence upon him. Is there any marked difference between the two

passages in point of tone, taste, judgment, measure, propriety? Who was the Englishman? He was a member of that great body of "Dissent," of whom Arnold thought it becoming to say that their "movement" "would be almost droll" save that it escaped that laughable character by being "so extremely irreligious"! It was a Baptist minister, Robert Hall. He was a century later than Bossuet, but then Hooker, as well as Taylor, was a contemporary of Bossuet, and Arnold might have quoted from Hooker a passage as sober, as weighty, as far off from extravagance, as was the passage quoted from Bossuet. Carlyle was in part contemporary with Robert Hall, but he produced in a very different style from Hall's; the cause of the difference was the difference of the men.

In the case of one of the exemplifications presented by Arnold, he expressly says, what in all his exemplifications is clearly implied, that "it lets us see what the presence of an academy does for style." Now that I hold to be a demonstrably—yes, even a demonstrated—groundless critical crotchet of Arnold's; he attributes to the influence of an academy what in fact is mainly due to individual temperament, character, genius. No doubt, commanding literary example always exerts its conforming influence; and no doubt commanding literary example, reenforcing itself by numbers in combination, will exert a conforming influence greater accordingly. An academy is therefore, of course, not without its literary influence, good or bad, or good *and* bad. But then there is always the literature of Attic Greek, to be academy enough to whomsoever it finds amenable to such high influence.

## VI

ARNOLD arraigns Burke for lapses into expression below the standard of severe good taste. In some of these instances, I think the critic uncritically fails to take sufficiently into account the fact that what he blames does not occur in otiose mere literature, but in speech or writing dominated by vehement practical purpose; in short, he is not considerate, not circumspect, enough. I am not sure that a truly-judging criticism would not rather approve than censure the rhetoric, racy of just esthetic disgust, as well as of just moral abhorrence, in which Burke speaks of Rousseau's incredible animalism. One has only to hold one's nose and read the appropriate parts of Rousseau's own "Confessions," in order to feel that this from Burke is excusable at least, if not justifiable: "Without one natural pang he [Rousseau] casts away, as a kind of offal and excrement, the spawn of his disgustful amours, and sends his children to the hospital of foundlings." To true criticism, the offensiveness is in what Burke, without exaggeration, describes, and not in the description—which is saved to one's taste even, much more to one's moral sense, by the fine moral scorn that is in it. One hardly finds any such justification for Arnold's own language, used at his leisure, without heat, to indicate his contempt for the "elaborate machine-work" of those whom he calls "my friends, the logicians."

"They set their machine in motion, and build up a fine showy edifice, glittering and unsubstantial like a pyramid of eggs; and



then they say, 'Come and look at our pyramid.' And what does one find it? Of all that heap of eggs, the one poor little fresh egg, the original intuition, has got hidden away far out of sight and forgotten ["got forgotten"]. AND ALL THE OTHER EGGS ARE ADDLED."

What about the good taste, the urbanity, not to say the felicity, of this malodorous illustration? I ask thus a question which answers itself. Evidently the comparison was chosen in order to make occasion for the closing sentence, which, I am afraid, Arnold wrote and left there, in the spirit of one who should say, "Come, look at my closing sentence"—since, save for such turn intended, "eggs" would never have been selected for building "a fine, showy edifice." Eggs are not a "glittering" architectural material, and a "machine" could hardly build with them a "fine, showy edifice," "pyramid" or other. (If it should be objected that eggs could hardly in any way be built into a pyramid, of course Arnold would laugh and confute with the story of Columbus showing that an egg could be brought to stand on end, did one but know how!) The illustration is singularly unhappy, since "the one poor little fresh egg" stands in no relation to the "pyramid" at all analogous to the relation in which stands the "intuition" represented by it to the finished product of the "logicians'" processes; and since, besides, "addled" eggs would do as well as any for architectural purposes. The "fine, showy edifice" would have to be demolished, with ruin to the eggs composing it, in order to its appearing that they were "addled"; and therewith the offense of the comparison would come out rank, and smell to heaven! The comparison at best is nothing better certainly than childish.

It is so nugatory that we commit an absurdity in dwelling upon it, only that it fairly represents Arnold in his singular lack at once of imagination and of saving good sense. Arnold was fond of rallying himself on his own ineptitude for philosophy and logic; and he let it be known that he really valued "intuition"—in which he undoubtedly felt himself strong—much more highly. But his own intuition here assuredly did not help him hit upon a happy means to a happy effect.

The egg-pyramid passage occurs in the "Preface" to "Essays in Criticism." By the way, it happened to be for the moment more convenient, and I used an earlier edition of the "Essays in Criticism" for making my citations, and so did not observe that this unhappy passage was excised from the later editions—until after I had written the comments preceding. These comments I permit to stand, they being still entirely pertinent to my purpose, which was, not to present an evaluation of Arnold's critical production, but to show what manner of man he was in his mental equipment. No man properly equipped for criticism could possibly have written, experimentally even, such a passage as that egg-pyramid passage. The "Preface" in which it occurs was conceived and written in a spirit of misbecoming levity mistaking itself for sprightly Attic humor—Arnold would perhaps, with some half-concealed self-complacency, have called it "vivacity"—but it contains at its close the most entirely charming bit of writing to be found anywhere, I think, in the whole cycle of Arnold's production, whether prose or verse. This is that rhapsody of his about Oxford, with its brief interlude of direct apostrophe beginning,

"Adorable dreamer!" But I really must show this fine passage:

"Beautiful city! so venerable, so lovely, so unravaged by the fierce intellectual life of our century, so serene!

" 'There are our young barbarians, all at play.'

And yet, steeped in sentiment as she lies, spreading her gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Age, who will deny that Oxford, by her ineffable charm, keeps ever calling us near to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal, to perfection—to beauty, in a word, which is only truth seen from another side—nearer, perhaps, than all the science of Tübingen. Adorable dreamer, whose heart has been so romantic! who hast given thyself so prodigally, given thyself to sides and to heroes not mine, only never to the Philistines! home of lost causes, and forsaken beliefs, and unpopular names, and impossible loyalties!"

I am almost tempted to borrow Arnold's own enthusiasm, so strangely misdirected by him, and, giving it a more suitable application, exclaim, "That has always seemed to me one of the finest things in English literature." *O si sic omnia!*

I might, I think, fairly say that Arnold's style is better in his later essays. But his criticism is not better correspondingly. This we shall see when we make an assay of his "Literature and Dogma" and of his "St. Paul and Protestantism." Meantime a word or two about his long-drawn-out essay (lectures) "On Translating Homer." This essay certainly lacks, in a quite remarkable degree, that trait of "rapidity" which Arnold held to be so distinguishing a characteristic of Homer. But it lacks also, in a hardly less remarkable degree, the trait of urbanity which, as critic of literature in general, he considered so desirable, and which he so often grieved to miss in English authors

criticized by him. Various contemporary fellow laborers of his in the field of Homeric translation he passes in review, with such an air of *de haut en bas* as violates the law of decorum and courtesy which surely ought to rule among gentlemen and scholars. Francis W. Newman in particular was justly offended at Arnold's treatment of him.

Was Arnold critically right in rating Homer as a "rapid" poet? If, by using the adjective "rapid" in characterization of Homer, he meant only that Homer's verse runs off readily and with ease, it may be granted that his characterization is just. But if, on the other hand, he meant that the action, the movement, the narrative, was rapid, I demur. Quite to the contrary of this, Homer was one of the most leisurely of poets. He gave his warriors time to deliver themselves of long speeches in prelude to battle or even in the midst of battle, and the interludes of feasting that relieved the stress of Homeric war were described by him with the fulness of one in no haste to get on with his story. Every change of speaker was marked with a whole hexameter line of introduction for the new speech, and speeches were not seldom repeated at full length in the same words, when, for instance, some person of the story was told, Go and tell such or such a one so and so. Homer, therefore, can not be truly pronounced "rapid," in the sense of his getting on expeditiously in his narrative of action; and mere fluency of verse is not well named "rapidity."

Arnold shows courage rather than good judgment in being willing to present specimens of his own handiwork in translation of Homer—after having found every version earlier than his experiments, with a sin-



gle exception not important in extent, unsatisfactory for one reason or another.

It would be endless to follow Arnold in the very winding and much-interrupted course of his treatment of his subject. It will, however, be to the purpose of the present paper to note the significant recurrence of Arnold to his haunting theme of "criticism." Having discovered in F. W. Newman's translation of Homer a quality which he designates as "eccentricity, arbitrariness," he generalizes, to declare that that quality is "the great defect of English intellect, the great blemish of English literature." Presently, in a long, laborious sentence (a sentence, by the way, not without its own "eccentricity, arbitrariness"), he says:

"They ["eccentricity" and "arbitrariness"] are the cause that, while upon none, perhaps, of the modern literatures has so great a sum of force been expended as upon the English literature, at the present hour this literature, regarded not as an object of mere literary interest, but as a living intellectual instrument, ranks only third in European effect and importance among the literatures of Europe; it ranks after the literatures of France and Germany."

Then Arnold explains:

"Of these two literatures, as of the intellect of Europe in general, the main effort, for now many years, has been a *critical* effort; the endeavor, in all branches of knowledge—theology, philosophy, history, art, science—to see the object as in itself it really is."

There immediately follows in Arnold's essay (one has to rally oneself to remember that it is an essay "On Translating Homer"! ) a sentence which, in characterizing unfavorably English literature in general, so exactly characterizes Arnold's own work in

particular, and not least his work in this present paper of his, that just self-consciousness might well have given him, when he wrote it, a wholesome reaction of thought. He says:

“But, owing to the presence in English literature of this eccentric and arbitrary spirit, owing to the *strong tendency* of English writers to *bring to the consideration of their object some individual fancy*, almost the last thing for which one would come to English literature is just that very thing which now Europe most desires—*criticism*.”

The italics in the final word, “criticism,” foregoing are Arnold’s—the italics preceding that word are mine.

## VII

OBSERVE that in Arnold’s list of what he calls “branches of knowledge,” “theology” leads. This precedence is suggestive. In truth, the theologic interest is of all interests, the literary not excepted, always the strongest with Arnold. We shall penetrate most deeply, most truly, into Arnold’s motive everywhere, at least when he is writing prose, if we understand him as, in his own way, a religious man. He was sincerely, profoundly, however mistakenly, religious. He applied his critical talent ever with the most zeal, the most heart, in dealing with religious subjects. His religious interest affected his criticism injuriously. It prevented his being “disinterested.” His lack of disinterestedness here—that is, in religious matters—led him widely astray in his criticism.

Take, for example, one of his most successfully influential works, his “Literature and Dogma.” With the

contention of that essay that the Bible is to be understood, interpreted, applied, as literature and not as dogma, I am fully in agreement. To be sure, even interpreted strictly as literature, the Bible yields dogma. Arnold himself derives dogma from it—not the dogma of orthodoxy, but dogma still. He does this by criticism as “eccentric, arbitrary,” as possible. The dogma he derives from the Bible is, I think, precisely as wrong as the criticism is by which he derives it—and more wrong it could not conceivably be. I shall not, however, criticize the wrong dogma, but only the wrong criticism by which the wrong dogma is come at.

Arnold’s contention, his theorem, that the Bible is literature rather than dogma is not his main proposition; it is simply a lemma to that. The lemma may be conceded to Arnold. What is his main proposition?

It is that the Bible, properly understood, does not teach, either expressly or implicitly—does not even tacitly assume—the being of a personal God—that “Jehovah,” of the Old Testament, and “God,” of the Old Testament and the New, were merely the idiosyncratic Hebrew way of naming “the enduring power not ourselves that makes for righteousness.” The early Hebrews, Arnold thinks, had what he calls an “intuition” to the effect that the irresistible “stream of tendency” in things set in favor of righteousness. This stream of tendency they named “Jehovah.” True, they attributed to it thought, feeling, will, but that was their poetical way; it was personification.

Now the idea of a personal God may or may not be a verifiable idea; Arnold insists that it is *not* a verifiable idea. That Hebrew “intuition,” discovered by Arnold, about the “Eternal not ourselves,” the “stream

of tendency," is, he says, a verifiable idea. You can prove its validity. How? By trying it. How? again. Why, assume that it is true, and you feel great inward satisfaction, a peace of mind, in fact, that passes understanding. There is your proof, according to Arnold. His dogma is that there is "an Eternal power not ourselves which makes for righteousness." As already intimated, it is no part of my object to argue either for or against this dogma. My concern is with the soundness of the criticism which makes the remarkable discovery that this dogma is the true sense of what the Bible says when it says "Jehovah," when it says "God."

Now, briefly and bluntly, criticism that finds the Bible not to teach, by unmistakable implication, by silent assumption, at least, the being of a personal God, is criticism as "eccentric, arbitrary," as criticism is capable of being. A critic who can interpret the Bible—which, let us remember, is literature—after such a fashion as that, is self-proved not a safe, not a trustworthy, critic of literature. The point is so self-evident that it does not need pressing. But consider.

The student of the Bible, of the Bible regarded as literature, faces in his document a sentence like this, for example: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so Jehovah pitieth them that fear him," and, facing that sentence, says, 'What this really means is only that the stream of tendency in things is in favor of those who stand in properly respectful relation to that stream of tendency, who regard it with reverence.' Perhaps such an attitude as that toward this "stream of tendency" is the attitude we ought all of us to assume and maintain. Whether it is or is not, is not



now our question. It is not now our question whether a personal Supreme Being does or does not exist; it is not now our question whether the idea of such a Being ought or ought not to be replaced by the more "verifiable" idea of an "Eternal not ourselves that makes for righteousness." The true question for us here is, What is the right interpretation of the foregoing sentence from the Bible? Does it imply a belief, mistaken or not, on the part of the writer, that Jehovah was a person? Or is it simply a lively, emotional way the Bible writer had of expressing an "intuition" of his to the effect that the existing "stream of tendency" in things was compassionate toward those who stood in proper awe of such "stream of tendency"? To ask these questions is to answer them—and of course by no means to answer them in Arnold's preposterous way.

Arnold does actually encounter the foregoing sentence from the psalm, and he deals with it intrepidly—perhaps some of my readers would like to see how. The encounter comes next to the climax of a series of Biblical expressions assembled by Arnold, in which the idea of a personal God, capable of loving and of being loved, would, to any sane ordinary reader of the Bible, seem inevitably and inextricably implied. Jehovah, in the texts cited by Arnold, has been represented under various figures, as a hiding-place from trouble, as a refuge from storm, as a shadow from heat, and at length Arnold feels heartened to undertake subduing even this verse of ours to his interpretation. Here is the way in which he does it: "The more we experience this shelter [Jehovah], the more we come to feel that it ["it"] is protecting even to tenderness:

Like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Eternal ["power not ourselves which makes for righteousness"] merciful unto them that fear him ["him" this time, but why not "it" as before?]. For a subtly felt reason, Arnold, so jealous in general for the antique simplicity of Scripture, is impelled here to depart from simplicity, and, for the eloquence of the word "pity" repeated in antiphony, substitute the less personal expression "is merciful unto." But does his interpretation seem to be that of a rational, candid critic of literature? Did the Scripture writer have in mind a tender-hearted "stream of tendency" conceived as exercising pity like the pity of a father for his children? Is such interpretative criticism at once ingenious and sane?

I know of no evidence that the early Hebrews had any such "intuition" as Arnold attributes to them. By the way, Arnold goes against that doctrine of evolution, evolution as applied to Hebrew religious history, which is made so much of in the "criticism" that he admires, achieved by the German mind. He goes against this master doctrine of his esteemed critics; for he thinks that the "intuition" he talks about grew dim, instead of brightening, with the progress of time, and that "the work of Jesus Christ" was, that Jesus Christ "*came*," to restore the "intuition." "Intuition"—"the intuition"—becomes a great word with Arnold in his "Literature and Dogma," and (p. 190, *édition de luxe*) he uses it absolutely with the emphasis of italics, thus, "He [Jesus Christ] *came to restore the intuition.*"

One can not doubt Arnold's good faith and sincerity in his pleading for his interpretation. The simplest, fairest way of accounting for his astounding "eccen-

tricity, arbitrariness," is to assume that his "disinterestedness" failed. He had evolved an "individual fancy" of his own (the "fancy," namely, that the idea of a personal God is not a "verifiable" idea), and his eager interest in this rendered him overdesirous to make out a case. The same influence operated with him to lead him to his enormous overvaluation of German literature as compared with English, in the respect of sanity, of avoidance of "eccentricity, arbitrariness," in criticism. Now it must be admitted that, for patient research, for learning applied to research, the German mind easily leads the world. But when you come to the question of the use to be made of material accumulated, then that same German mind leads the world for "eccentricity, arbitrariness." Each new German writer is likely to have his new "individual fancy," and to present his new vagary in thought. Novelty, difference, rather than truth, seems largely to be the aim of the German critic. Still, it would not be easy to adduce any instance of wild vagary, on the part of a German critic, surpassing in wildness what Arnold achieves in undertaking to interpret the Bible. But I need to give Arnold's own words:

"Instead of making our Hebrew speakers mean, in their use of the word God, a scientific affirmation which never entered into their heads [to say that God is a personal being, who loves, pities, wills, Arnold calls a 'scientific [meaning a pseudo-scientific] affirmation'], and about which many will dispute, let us content ourselves with making them mean, as matter of scientific fact and experience, what they did really mean as such, and what is unchangeable. Let us put into their 'Eternal' and 'God' no more science than they did—the enduring power not ourselves that makes for righteousness. They meant more by those names, but they meant this."

There was, according to Arnold, a true "science" put by the Hebrews into their words "Jehovah" and "God," and that true "science," the whole of it, is, according to him, expressed in his formula, "the enduring power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." The "more" that they meant was not "science." Just what the "more" was, he does not state. Whatever it was, it was not "science," according to Arnold. Why was just that part of the Hebrews' meaning in those words of theirs, "Jehovah," "God," "science"? Because, according to Arnold, it was "verifiable." How could it be verified and so converted into "science"? Nothing simpler, according to Arnold. As already intimated, you had only to "try it." How could you "try" such a formula? By believing it, Arnold naively says—with even an access of extremely naive pleasure on his part, observable in his manner, as he says it. The result to you will be peace of mind—wherewith the verification will be complete. There you have Arnold's idea of "science." What could be more childlike?

Probably I ought to show some of the *ipsissima verba* in which Arnold speaks as thus represented. In "Literature and Dogma," chapter X, answering the supposed question, "How are we to verify that there rules an enduring power not ourselves which makes for righteousness?" he says: "How? Why, as you verify that fire burns—by experience. Try it. You *can* try it. . . . Believe it and you will find the benefit of it." Elsewhere he expresses himself still more enthusiastically in the same sense.

A valued friend of mine, who has been kind enough to read for my benefit what foregoes in this paper,



and who loves truth and justice (as I do myself), was staggered on reaching the point at which I say: "There you have Arnold's idea of science. What could be more childlike?" "I am afraid this is not fair," was the faithful demurrer I heard; "I am afraid you have made Arnold appear more ridiculous than he really is." I gathered that the underlying thought in the demurrer was, It is not possible that Arnold should really regard his formula as "science," should really regard the affirmation he finds in Israel's word "God" as "science." For the satisfaction of those among my readers who may share my friend's feeling on this point, I beg to recall what has already been quoted from Arnold, as follows: "Let us content ourselves with making them ["our Hebrew speakers"] mean, as matter of *scientific* fact and experience, what they did really mean *as such . . . the enduring power not ourselves, which makes for righteousness.*" (The italics in the words "scientific" and "as such" are mine.) His formula, therefore, and what, according to him, Israel meant by their word "God," Arnold regarded as "science," and he so regarded it because it was "verifiable"—verifiable through the simple method of experience. You had only to "try it." I think I may repeat my question, "What could be more childlike?"

But now I have to ask, Why might not the "more," lodged in the Hebrews' meaning, when they uttered the words, "Jehovah," "God," be "verified" in the same simple way? Their "more" was no doubt the idea they had that "Jehovah," "God," was a person—a person who loved and who could be loved. What was there to hinder the verifying of this transcendently noble idea by the same expedient proclaimed by him

to be so triumphantly efficacious for verifying the Arnold formula? Why not "try it"—by believing it? Certainly even greater peace of mind would be the result.

Arnold says morality is transformed into religion by being touched with emotion. He says, moreover, that the Hebrews were an exceptionally, even a uniquely, religious race. He admires and praises them for being such. He thinks all mankind are greatly in debt to Israel, because Israel was so stedfastly religious. It was, of course, according to Arnold, their emotion that made them so. They loved Jehovah—as neither they, nor any, could love a "stream of tendency," however beneficent. Strange that Arnold should have thought, as apparently he really did think, that he was doing a true service to his fellow men by seeking to rid them of the idea that God was a being to be loved! Strange that he should have thought this, and at the same time have thought that religion was the chief good, while religion was in his view morality touched with emotion, and while he was taking away all chance of emotion that could raise morality into religion! Strange, I say, and yet it is hardly strange—with Arnold. It only would have been strange—rather it would have been sheerly impossible—if he had been a good thinker; that is, a good critic.

So it would have been impossible, had Arnold been a good critic, for him to find "sweet reasonableness" the commanding characteristic of the method of Jesus. It is incomprehensible how a student, how even a cursory reader, of the New Testament could so misunderstand his documents. Read the prolonged, the repeated, the heavy-shotted, denunciations of certain

classes among the Jews, that poured red-hot from the lips of Christ, the broadsides of "woes" that he launched against certain cities of the land; read the fierce, the branding, invectives which he uttered in face-to-face encounters with his Jerusalem hearers, reaching the climax of "Ye are of your father, the devil!"—consider his demonstration with the whip of small cords to clear the temple precincts of the sacrilegious invasion that profaned them—consider even the frequent severities of rebuke that he visited on his loyal disciples, and it will seem marvelous, to the point of incredible, that, in the teeth of all this, Arnold could confidently proclaim it the method of Jesus to maintain ever the tone and temper of "sweet reasonableness." Anything more "eccentric," more "arbitrary," more irreconcilable with the idea of sound criticism, with the master principle of seeing things as they really are, could hardly be imagined than is such confident proclamation from Arnold.

### VIII

ANOTHER example of loose thinking—that is, of misguided criticism—on Arnold's part. In "St. Paul and Protestantism" (pp. 49, 50, *édition de luxe*) Arnold says:

"The conversion of Paul is in itself an incident of precisely the same order as the conversion of Sampson Staniforth, a Methodist soldier in the campaign of Fontenoy. Staniforth himself relates his conversion as follows, in words which bear plainly marked on them the very stamp of good faith: 'From twelve at night till two it was my turn to stand sentinel at a dangerous post. I had a fellow sentinel, but I desired him to go away,

which he willingly did. As soon as I was alone, I knelt down and determined not to rise, but to continue crying and wrestling with God till He had mercy on me. How long I was in that agony I can not tell; but as I looked up to heaven I saw the clouds open exceeding bright, and I saw Jesus hanging on the cross. At the same moment these words were applied to my heart, Thy sins are forgiven thee. All guilt was gone, and my soul was filled with unutterable peace; the fear of death and hell was vanished away. I was filled with wonder and astonishment. I closed my eyes, but the impression was still the same; and for about ten weeks, while I was awake, let me be where I would, the same appearance was still before my eyes, and the same impression upon my heart. Thy sins are forgiven thee."

"An incident of precisely the same order" as the one thus related, Arnold pronounces the conversion of Paul to be. A truly extraordinary judgment for a man to make who takes himself seriously as a critic. The simple fact is that the two incidents have nothing in common, nothing in approach to mutual resemblance, except that in both cases a "conversion" occurred. Instead of being incidents of "precisely the same order," they are incidents separated from each other, save in the one respect named, as widely as possible; they differ by the whole heaven. Note:

First, as to the outward or objective features of the two cases:

1. The time, in Paul's case, was midday; the time, in Staniforth's case, was midnight.

2. Paul was journeying on urgent business; Staniforth was, until he knelt, standing on watch.

3. Paul was traveling, with companionship; Staniforth was alone, had taken pains to be alone.

4. Paul, unexpectedly to himself, was suddenly smitten helpless to the ground; Staniforth deliberately,



of set purpose, and of his own accord, assumed a kneeling posture.

Secondly, as to the inward or subjective features of the two cases:

1. Paul was a self-righteous Pharisee, complacently persuaded that he was at the moment doing God service; Staniforth was a convicted and penitent sinner.

2. Paul hated Jesus Christ; Staniforth adored Jesus Christ.

3. Paul thought of Jesus Christ as a deceiver; Staniforth thought of Jesus Christ as a Savior.

4. Paul was breathing out threatening and slaughter; Staniforth was praying, "wrestling with God."

5. Paul felt in no need of forgiveness; Staniforth felt in perishing need of forgiveness.

6. Paul was in a state of mind such that, had the idea of his own conversion once occurred to him, he would have flouted it with measureless scorn; Staniforth was eagerly, earnestly, agonizingly, desirous of conversion.

So much for the points of difference existing to start with, between the two cases—as far as those points admit of being arranged under heads of outward and inward conditions. Another point of antecedent difference, at once outward and inward, may be mentioned. Paul's environment, the atmosphere in which he lived and moved, was one of intense hostility to Christ; Staniforth's environment, the atmosphere in which he lived and moved—that is, the spiritual atmosphere and environment—was one of worship toward Christ, and of trust in Him for salvation through His suffering on the cross.

Now for the points of difference between the two

cases in what *happened* to Paul and Staniforth severally:

1. As already said, Paul was struck to the ground, blinded by an insufferable light from above; Staniforth voluntarily knelt to pray.

2. Paul's eyes suffered a physical effect, which perhaps continued his whole life long, but which, at any rate, when sight was restored to him after three days' blindness, yielded as it were scales from his eyeballs.

3. Paul heard a voice uttering words from on high, and even answering a question that he asked; Staniforth simply felt certain familiar words "applied to his heart," "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

4. Paul, though now convicted of sin, and rendered obedient in heart, yet had apparently no immediate sense of forgiveness; Staniforth felt at once that "all guilt was gone."

5. What Paul saw was for an instant only, and for that instant it was simply an intolerable light; Staniforth "saw Jesus hanging on the cross"—this, whether his eyes were open or closed, and the "impression" lasted the same "for about ten weeks."

Now I think true criticism would say that not even Staniforth himself for a moment supposed himself to be seeing, in the way of normal vision, "Jesus hanging on the cross." It could not be, for the "impression," he says, was the same when his eyes were closed. He evidently meant nothing more than that he had a vivid imagination of the spectacle of the crucifixion of Jesus. John Newton was in the prime of his manhood at about the same time with Staniforth, and he wrote a hymn, which it is not unlikely Staniforth had often heard sung, with this stanza in it:

"I saw one hanging on a tree  
 In agonies and blood;  
 He fixed his languid eyes on me  
 As near His cross I stood."

Staniforth's experience may have been in a sort colored and controlled by that very hymn; he, probably, no more than Newton, meant that he "saw" that spectacle in the sense of normal outward vision. One feels sure, from the narrative itself, carefully read, that Staniforth, if he had been asked closely, would have testified that he simply had a vivid imaginative view of Jesus hanging on the cross. Paul, on the other hand, as Arnold admits, thought that what happened to him happened indeed, happened objectively. Paul could hardly have doubted this—at least while that three days' blindness lasted, and then at the moment when those scales dropped from his eyes!

Arnold takes pains to point out the self-evidencing truthfulness of Staniforth's narration, and, incidentally in connection, he shows his faith in the story of the conversion of Paul. "Not the narrative in the Acts, of Paul's journey to Damascus, could more convince us of its own honesty" are Arnold's words. No question of "honesty" in either case, and yet this astonishing critic could declare that the two conversions were incidents of "precisely the same order"!

I well know what Arnold would have said in his lifetime to such a showing as that which foregoes. He would have smiled in his superior way and, with delightful, non-critical self-consciousness, amounting to naive unconsciousness, have said: 'My critic quite misses the point. His formidable-looking array of conscientiously classified, and painstakingly numbered,

specifications signifies nothing. They are like that pyramid of eggs! The points of difference mentioned are quite immaterial. The really material thing is that in both cases of conversion equally, the supposed supernatural played its part. Staniforth "saw"—that is, quite honestly supposed that he saw—what was not to be seen, what in fact was non-existent; Paul similarly "saw" and "heard" what really existed only in his own excited imagination. This resemblance, this identity, between the two cases makes them, however different in immaterial circumstances, of "precisely the same order."

This hypothetical answer of Arnold's (answer though hypothetical, as it here appears, yet quite certain to have been made by him, at any rate, the only answer ostensibly plausible that he, or that any man, could make) is uncritical in the highest degree. To the truly critical mind, those enumerated specifications are not only material, but absolutely conclusive as establishing the widest possible difference between the two cases. Midday in Syria was unfavorable to "visions," midnight on battle-ground tended to make visions not unlikely; the presence of companionship would naturally work against that abstracted mood of mind in which visions are begotten, solitude at least opposed no hindrance to an illusion of visions; tension of mind and will created by intent devotion to an urgent matter of practical business in hand is a condition so unfavorable to ecstasies of any sort that it may almost be said to render them for the time impossible; sentinel duty in solitude at night occupies the mind, or tends to occupy it, with contemplations of an order congenial with fancies; sense of security lulls, sense of



danger excites, the imagination; bloody purposes do not predispose the person entertaining them to have visions directly contrary to those purposes; prayer, intense prayer, is an exercise highly contributory to raptures and visions. There is no need to run further through the list of differences named, in order to show how material they are. One additional difference, by no means unimportant, may be mentioned: Paul was a highly cultivated man, and a man, though capable of mysticism, yet extremely well-ballasted with self-control and common sense; Staniforth may be presumed to have been, as private soldier, a man of moderate intellectual gifts and acquirements.

Such differences, so material, discriminated the two cases, and prevented their being incidents "of precisely the same order." But there remains to be noted again, and noted this time with emphasis, another difference of the greatest moment, which it behooved a man devoted to the disinterested endeavor to see things as they really are, not to have overlooked: *There is no supernatural at all in Staniforth's case, no supposed supernatural even.* The narrative itself quoted by Arnold, and so warmly approved by him as unquestionably "honest," incontestably shows this. Arnold, however, was not "disinterested" enough to see it; he was too much influenced by desire to have a case to his mind. There was a true supernatural in Paul's case, a supernatural not merely supposed by him in all honesty, but a supernatural that attested itself. That blindness and those "scales" were proof that is, granted the narrative in the Acts is a true narrative—nay, granted even it is only an "honest" narrative; that is, a narrative supposed by the nar-

rator to be true, which Arnold concedes it is. But I am not now arguing the supernatural character of Paul's conversion; I am simply pointing out how wanting in critical discernment and critical disinterestedness Arnold shows himself in treating this subject.

It is well for both writer and reader of the present paper to keep steadily in mind what the purpose of it is. The purpose of it is to ascertain by fair assay the true merit and value of Matthew Arnold as critic. The particular topic that we have just been considering at some length has not been exhausted of its instruction on this point.

The comparison of the two narratives—namely, that of the conversion of Paul and that of the conversion of Staniforth—afforded to Arnold, if he had but recognized it, and been able to avail himself of it, a fine chance to display critical ability of a high order. He came so near to this chance that his missing of it becomes, upon close examination, very noticeable, as it is also, upon due consideration, very significant. It will be recalled that he emphasized strongly the self-evidencing honesty of Staniforth's narrative—too strongly, I am inclined to think, although that is an excess, if the excess exists, on which I lay no stress. When he was considering for his object the character of Staniforth's narrative, he should have noted a feature of it that is far more important than its self-evidencing truthfulness, important as that feature of it is. The thing that Arnold here missed to observe was the total absence in Staniforth's narrative of traits tending to authenticate it as the narrative of what I may call original, independent, truly individual, experience on his part. What Staniforth experienced was evidently

furnished to him, matter and form, from without, in examples that he had known, to be experienced by him too, upon the occasion which, with earnest "crying and wrestling with God," he invoked. It was a stereotyped experience that Staniforth had. It conformed itself to precedent. I do not mean that it was not a genuine experience. But it was in no material respect peculiar. It was evidently one of thousands of such, occurring everywhere in Great Britain, during Wesley's time.

This character of Staniforth's experience differences it from Paul's in a respect more fundamental, more vital, by far, than did any, or than did all, of the points of contrast, numerous and important as these were, that have previously been mentioned. Paul's experience was unique. No example of such an experience had ever occurred before, no example of such an experience has ever occurred since. It was original, independent, individual. It was fit to the character and genius of the man. In Staniforth's case, all was commonplace, as evidently the man was commonplace too. Nothing was commonplace in the case of Paul. I say it then deliberately, I say it moderately, there could hardly be a greater critical mistake than Arnold committed when he pronounced these two conversions incidents "of precisely the same order." That one mistake of his is alone enough to prove Arnold not a trustworthy critic. But other single mistakes of his have, to the truly discerning mind, similar convincing power.

## IX

ARNOLD thinks and writes nobly of Paul; he esteemed him a truly great man, great in intellectual gifts, great in moral character, above all great in religious genius. He accepts the historic validity of the New-Testament accounts of him, even to the story, with all its incidents, of his conversion. He does not distinguish between this story as reported told by Paul himself and this story as directly told by the reporter, Luke. He does not doubt that Paul supposed himself the subject of a miraculous experience. How, then, does he save Paul from sentence as at least a weak-minded enthusiast, since he will not have him an impostor, and since to admit the reality of miracle in his case is, according to Arnold, out of the question? Why, he accomplishes this apparently difficult task in the easiest manner imaginable. He simply adduces a "parallel." There was Sir Matthew Hale, a good man, an enlightened man, a jurist of renown, yet he believed in witchcraft. This was because belief in witchcraft was universal around him. So Paul believed in miracles, because belief in miracles was universal around him. Therefore Paul had his Damascus experience! Such is the easy illation implied.

This alleged "parallel" satisfied Arnold. But it would not have satisfied him if he had had a disinterestedly and soundly critical mind. If he had had such a critical mind, he would have talked after some such fashion as this with himself: 'Let me see. How do I know that belief in miracle was universal around



Paul? Is there any evidence for it except what is contained in the New Testament? Does the New Testament contain any evidence to that effect? The New Testament reports indeed many miracles performed by Jesus Christ, or performed in His name; but it reports at the same time a prevalent disposition not to believe in those miracles. Those miracles are believed in now more generally than they were believed in when Paul lived. What evidence have I, then, that Paul lived in an atmosphere of prevailing superstitious belief in miracles? And then, granted that he did live in such an atmosphere, how would that fact lead him to believe in the particular miracle said to have befallen him on his way to Damascus? Such is the tenor of what a true critic would have said with himself in considering the case of Paul.

What Arnold actually does, supposes in effect that Paul's belief in miracles, that alone, gave us the Damascus story. 'Miracles happen, hence I believe, without ground for so believing, that a light brighter than the sun at noon blinded my eyes, and that a voice from above spoke most unexpected Hebrew words to me'—such would be the impossible sequence of reasoning for Paul, did his belief in miracles account for what befell him that day near Damascus. Would really sane criticism, would a truly disinterested endeavor to see things as they are in themselves, lead to any such lame and impotent result as that? The most that can reasonably be said is that Paul's belief in miracles (if he had such a belief) rendered it not impossible that he should believe in a miracle befalling himself; it had no tendency whatever to make him *imagine* a miracle befalling himself, least of all that particular miracle,

at that particular moment, under those particular circumstances.

If Arnold had had a disinterestedly and soundly critical mind, he would have perceived that, in order to the existing of a just parallel between Sir Matthew Hale, in relation to witchcraft, and the apostle Paul, in relation to his Damascus experience, it would be necessary that Sir Matthew Hale should have supposed *himself* to be the victim of witchcraft, as the apostle Paul was the subject of that miraculous experience of his. It was not sufficient that Hale should believe in witchcraft in general. The parallel that so contented Arnold was in truth no parallel at all. It was even farther off from being a parallel than I have yet shown. To constitute it a true parallel, Sir Matthew Hale, believing in the supernatural, as Paul supposedly did, must have thought he experienced suddenly *something supernatural that had never befallen any one before*; for that was the case with Paul. But even with this necessary condition supplied, something would still be lacking to complete the parallel. Indeed, to complete the parallel, the most important, the most essential thing of all, would still be lacking. There would have to be a conversion, a violent change, an abrupt revolution of character and of life, in Sir Matthew Hale. Nor only that. There would have to be a sequel of result, result epoch-making, but, much more than epoch-making, world-renewing, history-usurping, history-transforming. Without such a sequel to the supposed experience of Sir Matthew Hale, the idea of making that supposed experience a parallel to Paul's experience would be uncritical to the degree of preposterous. This Arnold would have seen had he been

a disinterested, genuine critic. That such a critic he was not, has now, I may assume, been sufficiently shown. By way of a little excess of proof, a final instance may further be supplied.

In "Culture and Anarchy," in the second chapter, that entitled "Sweetness and Light," occurs the following remarkable passage; the remarkable passage about to be shown is preceded by a concession to Benjamin Franklin, couched in very characteristic, condescending phrase, as being, Arnold says, "a man the most considerable, it seems to me, whom America has yet produced":

"I remember the relief with which, after long feeling the sway of Franklin's imperturbable common sense, I came upon a project of his for a new version of the Book of Job [it was really for a new version of the *Bible*] to replace the old version, 'the style of which,' says Franklin, 'has become obsolete and thence less agreeable. I give,' he [Franklin] continues, 'a few verses which may serve as a sample of the kind of version I would recommend.' [Job, first chapter, ninth verse, which Arnold quotes from the old version, to point the contrast of Franklin's proposed rendering, 'Doth Job serve God for naught?'] 'Does your Majesty imagine that Job's good conduct is the effect of mere personal attachment and affection?' Franklin suggests as an improvement. I well remember [Arnold says] how, when first I read that, I drew a deep breath of relief and said to myself, 'After all, there is a stretch of humanity beyond Franklin's victorious good sense!'"

Is not that naive? Arnold's ecstasy of relief must have been, for the moment, too much for his intellectual balance, or he would hardly, even in confidential soliloquy, have expressed himself so abnormally as he did. That "stretch of humanity beyond Franklin's victorious good sense"!

Really, the critical crassness displayed in such a

misunderstanding on Arnold's part of Franklin almost staggers comprehension. The blunder is too absurd to be amusing, it becomes fairly distressing. Arnold speaks of "coming upon" that project of Franklin's. He must have "come upon" it in some chance way, outside the text of any authorized edition of Franklin's works. In Sparks's ten-volume edition, under the title "Bagatelles"—a title adopted from Franklin's own manuscripts—there are assembled several *opuscules*, comparatively light, or openly humorous, mere *nugæ*, some of them, which Franklin's son says his father amused himself with among his intimate friends in London and Paris. One of these "bagatelles" is the project of which Arnold speaks with such solemnity, a solemnity worthy of one of his "Philistines," as having brought for him a welcome release from the dominance of Franklin's "imperturbable common sense." Such language, by the way, from Arnold seems to imply some considerable acquaintance on his part with Franklin's productions. How could he, then, have failed to learn that Franklin's tendency to humor was as characteristic of him as was his "imperturbable common sense"? If he had "come upon his sample" of Franklin's version in its proper place, he would have found it, under the subordinate title "The Levee," starting off thus: "And it being levee day in heaven, all God's nobility came to court to present themselves before Him; and Satan appeared in the circle, as one of the ministry. And God said to Satan, You have been some time absent; where were you? And Satan answered, I have been at my country-seat, and in different places visiting my friends." It is hardly conceivable that Arnold could have taken



*that* as seriously proposed by Franklin. It must be that he very uncritically took his quotation from some source in which it appeared at second hand, detached and incomplete. But even so, it was, to use one of Arnold's own words, a case of astonishing "cecity" in him not to see that Franklin was joking.

## X

Now that Arnold should have made the mistakes of understanding which have been pointed out is sufficiently strange; but the really significant thing about it, the thing that renders it pertinent and important in the present examination and assay of his critical production, is that he is thus self-shown to have been so constituted that he *could* make such mistakes. To the properly equipped critic, such mistakes would be impossible. The mistakes pointed out are merely salient exemplifications of a quality in Arnold's mental make-up that pervasively affects, in a greater or less degree, all his criticism. The simple truth is that, with all his attraction toward the business of criticism, Arnold was constitutionally unfitted for that business. It was his yielding to an "individual fancy" of his own that prompted him to account uncritically for Thomas Gray's being so comparatively unproductive in poetry, by saying that it was because his time in England was a time of prose. But if Gray had had an irresistible inward vocation to produce poetry in large volume, he would have gone far toward making his time as much a time of poetry as was the time of Milton before him. Gray's character, his genius, his

fondness for culture, for learning, his lack of impulse to express himself whether in verse or in prose, sufficiently explain his slender literary product. What he did produce has not the character to indicate a great pressure of fulness in his mind eager for vent. There is no profuence in it.

When Arnold singles out from the "Paradise Lost" a line as nearly commonplace in thought, in phrase, and in rhythm, as almost any line to be found in the poem—a line like

"And what is else not to be overcome"—

and treats it as a kind of touchstone for test of the true thing in poetry, claiming pregnantly to find in that line an "accent" to distinguish it from all possible poetry produced, as Dryden's was, and Pope's, in "an age of prose and reason"—I say, confronting such a critical evaluation, one is at a stand how to account for Arnold's arriving at it. It seems almost like a case of pure affectation on his part. The line so valued by him is awkward in expression, besides being not very clear as to sense, and it comes perilously near being an anticlimax in the place where it stands. A similar arbitrariness, if not affectation, appears in Arnold's maintaining that in the line

"And Teiresias and Phineus, prophets old,"

Milton's rhythm is as admirable as it is in lines of the order of this:

"With dreadful faces thronged, and fiery arms."

Arnold was temperamentally incapable of appreciating a master of expression like Macaulay, for example. He quotes two or three lines from Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome" and oracularly detects in

them the ring of base metal. The true critic would have said: 'The verse of Macaulay in his Lays is of course not poetry in any high sense, and that critic misses the mark who appraises it and condemns it as if it pretended to be such. The Lays are simply an incomparably spirited embodiment of the primitive Roman genius and character as Livy conceived and represented that genius and that character. No true lover of literature, with taste and comprehension broad enough to constitute the qualified critic, can fail to feel the manly stir and rally that Macaulay has put into his lines. There is base metal in them only to the reader who falsely judges them as pretending to be what they are not, and what they were never meant to be.'

There is exasperating temptation to multiply excessively the specifications of flaw in the sanity and justice of Arnold's criticism. I stoutly refrain, but I yield to the sense of need I feel to point out the shortcomings of the style in which Arnold expresses himself. In a volume of "Selections" from Arnold's prose, prepared ten years ago with care and skill by a gentleman who was at the time a member of the faculty of instruction in Harvard University, it is remarked by the editor that "in some respects his [Arnold's] style, despite possible faults of manner that will later be considered, is the best model available for students of prose." I do not myself think that any author's style, however admirable, should be used as a "model," but the words quoted hint the extent to which, in highly respectable quarters, Arnold's style exerts its influence to conform the style of nascent authors. To be sure, "in some respects" is an elas-

tically extensible qualification of praise, but "possible faults of manner," on the other hand, has much the effect of making the qualification null. "Possible" is a note of deference not to be mistaken. For my own part, I hold that Arnold's style is not good; that it is, in most respects, an example of what is to be shunned rather than emulated. This requires some support of argument and instance.

Macaulay had "a kindness," so he testified of himself—and he amply showed that it was a genuine kindness, not an affected, condescending sentiment—for Leigh Hunt, mutually antipathetic in quality of genius, of character, of conduct, as the two men notoriously were. Arnold seemed to have no "kindness" for Macaulay, not even of the condescending sort so dear to him in his attitude toward others. By the way, both the kindness and the condescension are singularly shown in Arnold's treatment of Stopford Brooke's "Primer." Really, Arnold must have had an "individual fancy" of his own as to what urbanity is if he thought that urbanity was reconcilable with the schoolmaster tone in which he deals publicly with his friend Stopford Brooke. Judging from an allusion in one of Arnold's letters, one gathers that Mr. Brooke took his schooling from his critic in good part, with all docility, even with thankfulness. But as a mere matter of form, and decorum in appearance before the public, it would seem that, for his own sake, Arnold should have adopted a tone of more well-bred deferential complaisance, of greater urbanity.

Arnold begins his essay on the "Literary Influence of Academies" in a manner highly characteristic of his method both as to style and as to tone and temper.



"It is impossible [he says] to put down a book like the history of the French Academy . . . without being led to reflect upon the absence, in our own country, of any institution like the French Academy, upon the probable causes of this absence and upon its results."

Just why the "putting down" of a book should exert such a compelling influence is not immediately clear. "Being led" has no subject provided for it, and in general the awkwardness of expression is sufficiently marked. Arnold proceeds:

"A thousand voices will be ready to tell us that this absence is a signal mark of our national superiority; *that* it is in great part owing to this absence *that* the exhilarating words of Lord Macaulay, given to the world by his *very clever* nephew, Mr. Trevelyan, are so profoundly true."

(The italics foregoing are mine.) The reader should not miss the flavor of sarcasm intended in the adjective, "exhilarating." The "insinuation" was as dear to Arnold as it was to his model and master, Ste.-Beuve. "*Very clever*"—how condescending toward a man in every respect Arnold's intellectual superior! "*Profoundly true*" will be seen to be language quite inappropriate, considered in relation to what it was that Macaulay affirmed; true indeed this was, but there was no profoundness in the truth: "It may safely be said the literature now extant in the English language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together." Arnold comments:

"I dare say this is so; only, remembering Spinoza's maxim that the two great banes of humanity are self-conceit and the laziness coming from self-conceit, I think it may do us good,

instead of resting in our preeminence with perfect security, to look a little more closely why this is so, and whether it is so without any limitations."

If Spinoza really did make it a "maxim" that such were "*the* two great banes of humanity," his authority as maxim-maker does not deserve to be very commanding. If he merely meant that self-conceit and consequent laziness were "banes," even "great banes," why, 'True enough,' we all say, 'but wherefore invoke Spinoza's name to give gravity to a truism like that?' "Instead of resting in our preeminence"—that seems to imply a misunderstanding on Arnold's part of what Macaulay said. Macaulay's quoted remark neither expressly nor implicitly asserted any "preeminence" for English literature. It does not hint at any comparison whatever of English literature with contemporary literatures. For all that is contained in what Macaulay is quoted as affirming, he might have affirmed the same of contemporary French literature, of contemporary German literature. Macaulay expressed himself carefully, moderately, justly. "Ex-tant in the English language" is a form of words inclusive of works translated into English from other languages. There is therefore no "self-conceit" in Macaulay's statement. It is simply a sober statement of indisputable fact. It was uncritical to characterize it as, in the spirit of it, "exhilarating." "To look why this is so," seems to me a slovenliness of expression; such likewise seems to me, "to look whether it is so." "Whether it is so without any limitations," is a clause worthy of attention, not only for its style but also for its sense. "Whether it is so" harks back to Arnold's admission at the beginning of this remark-

able sentence, "I dare say this is so." That is, "I dare say, the literature now extant in the English language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together." This unqualified, unlimited statement Arnold "dares say" is true; but he asks, "Is it true 'without any limitations'?" What kind of thinking'—that is, of criticism—is this? At the close of the essay, Arnold recurs to Macaulay. He plays pedagogue in doing so :

"Every one among us with any turn for literature [he says—and forthwith makes every such one his pupil, and pedagogically tells him he] will do well to remember to what short-comings and excesses which such an academy [as the French Academy] tends to correct we are liable; and the more liable, of course, for not having it. He will do well constantly to try himself in respect of these, steadily to widen his culture, severely to check in himself the provincial spirit; and he will do this [?] the better the more he keeps in mind that all mere glorification by ourselves of ourselves or our literature, *in the strain of what, at the beginning of these remarks, I quoted from Lord Macaulay, is both vulgar, and, besides being vulgar, retarding.*" (Italics mine.)

The magisterial air of the foregoing, I, for my part, do not know how to make seem consistent with that "urbanity" which Arnold so emphatically recommends. He, however, seems playing schoolmaster to every fellow of his in the guild of letters; that is, to "every one with any turn for literature." How account for this singular absence of proper self-consciousness? I myself account for it—it is a pervasive, penetrative quality in all Arnold's criticism—by a certain subtle profound provincialism in him under the influence of which he constantly does his work. It is an exceedingly narrow provincialism, as well as subtle

and profound. Arnold seems always to write as in view of a very closely restricted circle of minds nigh at hand of whose sympathy and applause he feels sure. What cares he for the "Philistines" without? "The remnant," the chosen, the children of light—they will understand. Surrounded by such an intimate audience, he feels supported in playing schoolmaster to the general public. A coterie of admirers near him may always be depended upon to admit his authority, and he can thus feel confident in giving at least his little senate laws.

But graver than the failure in urbanity implied in his magisterial air, far graver than that, is the really offensive fling at Macaulay as "vulgar." Not even as Arnold misunderstood what Macaulay said (and gave in his own concurrence) was there anything "vulgar" in the "strain" of it. So taken, it was simply the sober statement of a supposed fact. But taken as Macaulay clearly expressed it, and as Arnold was bound to understand it if he was going to criticize it, it was not within seeing distance of any "vulgar" braggadocio. In truth, it may, I think, safely be said that Arnold's comment itself comes much nearer being "vulgar," and it certainly is more "retarding."

Barren of "ideas," Arnold charges Macaulay with being. Well, Macaulay's quality was not preeminently the quality of a "thinker." But I have just now given myself the pleasure of looking over once more a considerable surface of Macaulay's production, apart from his historical torso, and I am not impressed with his poverty in "ideas." In fact, if we wisely consider the nature of the subjects with which mostly he dealt, we shall, I think, be convinced that he brought to



their discussion not only a vast wealth of culture derived from various reading, but also a splendid endowment of ability to treat them in the largest, most liberal way, that thus the whole field in which he exercised his literary art was illuminated by him with all the illustration that the law of pertinency, of unity, of harmony, allowed, illustration drawn from the fund, remarkably at his command, of the best that has been written in the world, with enrichment besides due to ripe, sane, just, original thought of his own—everything being set in a light incomparably revealing, through a style which, for clearness, force, effectiveness, has never, as I fully believe, been surpassed in any literature.

Barren of whimsy, of crotchet, of eccentricity, of arbitrariness, Macaulay prevailingly is. (I except his brilliant young essay on Milton, with its paradox about the impossibility of great poetical production in an enlightened age. There was a strong infusion of what it is hard to distinguish from conscious unfairness on Arnold's part in his dwelling, as he did, for disparagement, on this Milton essay of Macaulay's—well known to have been repudiated by its author—when he wrote his article entitled "A French Critic on Milton"). Good sense—a good sense so complete, so dominant, that it is almost felt as scornful—sobriety of judgment, perfect intellectual sanity, disturbed only (and to the reader who reads Macaulay right not even so disturbed) by an irrepressible buoyancy in the writer toward indulging his delight in clearness and in force to the point of exaggerating by antithesis and epigram—this character in Macaulay's prose may mislead the undiscerning to imagine that what, by the

magic of his style, he makes seem so intelligible, so indisputable, is therefore mere commonplace. So to estimate Macaulay is a serious critical mistake. And that mistake Arnold was perhaps the earliest, the most influential, in making.

I do not propose Macaulay as a model in style. As I have intimated, I conceive it to be an error in judgment to make any man a model in style. But set two passages side by side, one from Arnold and one from Macaulay, and see which, in point of mere style of expression, better deserves to excite the emulation of young writers. It is not easy to find passages suitable for such parallel exhibition; but, in despair of doing better, I take two passages in which, for the moment, both writers rally, if I should not say rather satirize, the British public. In Arnold's case, it is partly Mr. Roebuck individually that is the object of the sarcasm. Arnold takes up a phrase of that orator's and plays upon it after a fashion of his, setting in contrast a bit of distressing news from one of the current English journals, in which the name "Wragg" occurs:

" 'Our old Anglo-Saxon breed, the best in the whole world'—how much that is harsh and ill-favored there is in this best! *Wragg!* If we are to talk of ideal perfection, of 'the best in the whole world,' has any one reflected what a touch of grossness in our race, what an original shortcoming in the more delicate spiritual perceptions, is shown by the natural growth among us of such hideous names—Higginbottom, Stiggins, Bugg. In Ionia and Attica they were luckier in this respect than 'the best race in the world'; by the Ilissus there was no Wragg, poor thing! And 'our unrivalled happiness'—what an element of grimness, bareness, and hideousness mixes with it and blurs it; the work-house, the dismal Mapperly Hills—how dismal those who have seen them will remember—the gloom, the smoke, the cold, the strangled illegitimate child! 'I ask you whether, the world over

or in past history, there is anything like it.' Perhaps not, one is inclined to answer; but at any rate, in that case, the world is very much to be pitied."

It has been difficult in the course of copying the foregoing, to refrain from interjecting brackets to point out the irrelevant, unreasonable, whimsical peevishness of Arnold's remarks—offsetting Mr. Roebuck's claim, on behalf of his country and his race, of a substantial well-being unequaled elsewhere in the world, with dilettante exclamations about certain ill-looking, cacophonous English proper names. And did Arnold really suppose that Ionia and Attica had no proper names that to Ionian and Attic eyes and ears looked and sounded plebeian?

Apropos of the way in which Lord Byron was treated by public opinion in Great Britain, Macaulay writes:

"We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality. In general, elopements, divorces, and family quarrels pass with little notice. We read the scandal, talk about it for a day, and forget it. But once in six or seven years our virtue becomes outrageous. We can not suffer the laws of religion and decency to be violated. We must make a stand against vice. We must teach libertines that the English people appreciate the importance of domestic ties. Accordingly some unfortunate man, in no respect more depraved than hundreds whose offenses have been treated with lenity, is singled out as an expiatory sacrifice. If he has children, they are to be taken from him. If he has a profession, he is to be driven from it. He is cut by the higher orders, and hissed by the lower. He is, in truth, a sort of whipping-boy, by whose vicarious agonies all the other transgressors of the same class are, it is supposed, sufficiently chastised. We reflect very complacently on our own severity, and compare with great pride the high standard of morals established in England with the

Parisian laxity. At length our anger is satiated. Our victim is ruined and heart-broken. And our virtue goes quietly to sleep for seven years more."

## XI

I HAVE written this frank criticism of Arnold as critic, in the full consciousness of two things recommending to the writer moderation and care, not to say diffidence. One thing is, the formidable concurrence of formidable opinion opposed to my own; and the other thing is, the singularly amiable character in which Arnold is presented to us all, both in the testimonies of those who knew him well personally, and in the still more convincing testimony that his own published letters bear to the intimate charm of the son, the husband, the father, the brother, the friend, that Matthew Arnold was. Of this latter testimony I took great pleasure in publishing my hearty recognition, at the time when his letters were first given to the public. But it would be unfaithfulness to several paramount interests, if I should allow either awe of authority or sense of the beauty of Arnold's character in private, and especially in domestic, life, to keep me silent concerning what I feel to be his very serious faults as a critic.





**MATTHEW ARNOLD AS POET**



## MATTHEW ARNOLD AS POET

### I

IN sequel of the examination foregoing of Matthew Arnold's criticism, I now undertake an examination of his poetry. The examination will no doubt seem to many as severe as of course I mean to make it searching; but it will be candid and will aim to be fair. I shall try to escape the influence of current convention, and to be independent and genuine—this equally without deferential timidity on the one hand, and without ostentatious temerity on the other.

Many years ago, attracted by a laudatory review of Arnold's poems, I sought delight in reading them. I failed to find what I sought. I blindly blamed my own want of insight, and, for a long time after, abode in that uncomfortable state of mind as to Arnold's verse. A simple incident at length occurred that led to a change in this mental attitude of mine. I heard a brilliant university teacher of elocution, a man of more than the ordinary degree of culture for one in the line of his profession, read to an appreciative audience Arnold's chief long poem, his "Sohrab and Rostum." The poem was well rendered, but I listened, as also the reader seemed to me to read, with difficulty and labor. I was at a loss to account for this experi-



ence, and I took resort to a private perusal of the poem, in quest of the reason. I found the reason in the character of the work itself. "Sohrab and Rustum" is not, in any high sense, a true poem. It lacks "inevitableness." It is a great effort, and not a great poem. Arnold manifestly labored at it with conscientious exertion of his best powers, but he did not succeed in producing what he wished to produce—which I have understood to be a simple, "objective" poem as free as Homer's poetry is free from the modern vice of self-consciousness and introspection. I shall not, however, criticize the work from the point of view of its failure to be Homeric, but from the point of view of its failure to be a well-conceived, well-executed treatment of a well-chosen theme for a narrative poem.

Perhaps it may be well enough to begin with the matter of Arnold's choice of theme. It is to be accounted great good fortune for a poet when he lights upon a happy theme for the employment of his powers. This good fortune did not befall Arnold when he decided on writing his "Sohrab and Rustum." The "fable" of the poem is supplied in a doubtful story belonging to the annals of Persia. Sohrab is the illegitimate son of Rustum, who abandoned the mother, not his wife, before her child was born. She found means afterward to convey to the faithless father the false information that his offspring by her was a daughter instead of a son. Grown to man's estate, the youth wins fame as a warrior, but, in a spirit of filial affection and loyalty not accounted for, he restlessly seeks Rustum, whom he knows to be his father. The two finally meet in mortal combat, neither combatant

aware that it is a duel between father and son. The son falls by the hand of his father. That, in short, is the story of "Sohrab and Rustum."

Not a very promising theme for a narrative in verse. Yet conditions might have existed which would have made it not wholly ineligible. If the two warriors had been noble men, enlisted generously on opposite sides in a noble cause, there would have been in the story the elements of possible pathos and power, mounting even to the height of overcoming tragedy—tragedy made tender and beautiful by the presence in it of heroism, of magnanimity, of self-sacrifice, of filial devotion, of paternal affection. But neither combatant seems to have been a soldier for a noble cause; they were both of them apparently mere soldiers of fortune, fighting for nothing better than fame. Rustum at least was an impure man, faithless alike to his wife, if he had one, and to the unwedded mother of his son. If he had traits of virtue, besides courage, to redeem his character to gentle judgment, not to say to admiration, these do not appear, either in the legend about him, which Arnold gives in quoted words as note to his poem, or in the poet's treatment of his subject. There is nothing whatever in Rustum's words or in his deeds, as shown in the poem, to excite the reader's admiration or sympathy for him. He appears unrelievedly brutal throughout. His selfish sorrow at the end is hardly an exception, and the same may be said of the passing touch of pseudo-sympathetic egoistic sentiment for Sohrab exhibited by him just before the beginning of the combat.

Sohrab, if not a very attractive character, is at least not repulsive like his father. That he should cherish

such a filial feeling as he does for a father never personally known by him, but known by him to be so unworthy, is a trait which, besides being extremely improbable—psychologically almost impossible, indeed—denotes a sentimental weakness in him of no very high moral tone. He ought to have sought his father, if at all, in order to upbraid him for his unfaithfulness both to his mother and to himself—this, far rather than in order to fling his heart down in fondling affection at such a father's feet.

The conditions, then, that might have made the "fable" of "Sohrab and Rustum" suitable for a fine poem did not exist, and Arnold must be pronounced unfortunate in his choice of theme. "Unfortunate," I say, but in critical strictness I ought to say unwise, ill-judging; wrong choice of subject is part of the demerit of a poet considered as artist.

But now let us suppose that the Amphictyonic Council required Arnold to write a poem on this ineligible subject, and let us proceed to consider how he performed his compulsory task. Did he manage his subject well or ill? I am compelled to say that in my opinion he managed it ill, in some important respects surprisingly ill.

The chief demerit of "Sohrab and Rustum" lies in its lack of that which would necessarily have been its chief merit had it been present—namely, true imaginative quality. This lack is shown in so many ways that it may justly be said to be pervasive. It appears in the descriptions, in the similes, in the conduct of the narrative, especially of the narrative of the combat, and even in the providing of accouterment for the combatants. Rustum, for instance, is furnished by

Arnold with a shield, which of course must be carried in a manner to make one of his two arms unavailable for other purpose, except that possibly the hand on that side of the body might grasp the spear, which also is supplied to the warrior; a sword is not omitted from the equipment; but, most noteworthy perhaps of all, Rustum is armed with an enormous club, such in size and weight that no one but Rustum could wield it. Not even Rustum himself, it would seem, could wield it properly, for at his first and only attempt with it, it plays him false, flies out of his hand and actually brings its wielder down on all fours into the sand. If, in addition to mail clothing his whole body even to his hands, Rustum must needs have with him such an amount of encumbering weaponry, together with helmet and shield, Arnold might at least have provided him with an armor-bearer. Instead of this, a horse, a very remarkable horse, accompanies him to the battle, much after the manner of a dog, taking no part whatever in the action, but only, at a certain crisis of it, uttering a most lamentable boding cry, which had the singular effect to make the two watching hostile armies "quake for fear," while, still stranger, the river "Oxus *curdled* as it crossed his stream."

It deserves to be noted that whereas Arnold gives Rustum a mighty Homeric breakfast the morning of the struggle, he sends Sohrab to his fate breakfastless and weakened by a night of restless tossing without sleep. This unfairness on the poet's part seems to have been a pure inadvertence, for he makes nothing of the inequality under which the two combatants thus engage; but it is a curious inadvertence, and it has a certain telltale bearing. It incidentally shows with



how little true imaginative sympathy Arnold, brooding on his theme, entered into the necessary concomitant conditions of the case.

## II

Now as to the incidents of the fight: The two combatants have a parley. Rustum was then first to act. He "hurled his spear"—presumably at Sohrab, though this is not stated; for all that appears in the narrative it may have been flung wild as a mere flourish of demonstration. But its course was peculiar. It was more like that of a battle-ax swung than that of a spear hurled. The language used describes a blow rather than the flight of a spear. "Down from the shoulder, down it came," the poet says. The downward direction is thus so emphatically given that one is at once prompted to think of the action as taking place at close quarters and not at such a distance as on the contrary *hurling* implies. But the downward direction is further insisted upon, and now with a simile, a singular simile:

"As on some partridge in the corn a hawk,  
That long has towered in the airy clouds,  
Drops like a plummet."

The simile, it will be observed, is itself affected with a simile. "Like a plummet," Arnold says. This, considered simply as descriptive of the hawk's descent, is striking, strikingly good. The line, "That long has towered in the airy clouds," introduces a circumstance which seems apt enough so long as one thinks only of the hawk and of the hawk's descent;

but the moment one comes to consider the relation of it to the proper object of the poet in his narrative, it is as unapt as it well could be. The flying spear could not have hovered "long" in the air before it "dropped like a plummet." In fact, it is impossible to conceive of a hurled spear's behaving as Rostum's spear did. "Sohrab saw it come and sprang aside, quick as a flash." It came "down," the poet says. Did Sohrab see it coming down? Then the descent must have occupied an appreciable portion of time. But since the coming down was only "from the shoulder," how could this be? After Sohrab's agile avoidance of the spear, it is noted by the poet that the spear "hissed." Read a little attentively, and it will almost look to you as if the spear did not "hiss" until it saw that it was going to miss its aim! Whether indeed a spear, coming down from the shoulder, could *hiss* on its way, simply as the effect of friction with the air, my own experience with spears, or knowledge of them gained through reading, does not enable me to say; but as a matter of mere speculation it seems to me extremely improbable. I prefer to suppose that the spear in the case was conceived by the poet as hissing from vexation at missing its aim.

"Then Sohrab threw, in turn," the poet proceeds to say. What Sohrab threw, as well as at what, it is left to the reader's mental activity and judgment to decide—until later he learns that Sohrab "full struck Rostum's shield," when the second of the two doubts, the doubt as to "at what," is resolved. Again the effect produced is described with the emphasis of repetition—"Sharp rang, the iron plates rang sharp," it is said, with effect of the "forcible-feeble" in expression;

“but turned the spear,” is added, and now we know that it was his spear that Sohrab “threw.” As Rustum’s shield was “full struck,” the statement that the spear was turned can not mean that the spear was simply deflected and caused to glance aside; the meaning must be that the spear-*point*, and not the spear, was “turned.”

Now follows a pass from Rustum very carefully described by Arnold and well worthy of careful attention from the reader. “And Rustum seized his club,” it is said. Where was his club? How had Rustum carried it? What did he do with it when he hurled his spear? We are left to conjecture. Let us suppose that he simply laid it on the ground beside him. Now at any rate he seized it. It was a portentous club. Arnold describes it elaborately. As has already been said, nobody could wield it but Rustum. It was “an unlopped trunk.” Just what an “unlopped trunk” could be, it is not easy to imagine. No tree is spoken of; but “trunk,” used absolutely here, must mean “trunk of a tree.” Since the object in question was a club, it was not of course the trunk of a standing tree. But “lop” means “cut off.” “Unlopped” should therefore mean “not cut off.” How could a tree-trunk not cut off constitute a club? But perhaps the sense is that the tree-trunk was “unlopped” (not cut off) as to its branches. The branches, then, were still on the trunk. What sort of club would a tree-trunk with branches make? “An unlopped trunk it was, and huge, still rough,” the poet says. The adverb “still” suggests that the roughness was in process of being worn away, but that the wearing-away process was not yet finished. “Rough” may throw a light backward on “unlopped.” Does the poet mean that

the "trunk," though said to be "unlopped," was indeed lopped, but not closely, that spurs or stubs of the cut-off branches remained on it? Then "unlopped" must be pronounced not a well-chosen adjective.

The poet adds a comparison to assist the reader in appreciating the character of this club. He says the "trunk" was

"like those which men in treeless plains  
To build them boats fish from the flooded rivers,  
Hyphasis or Hydaspes, when, high up  
By their dark springs, the wind in winter-time  
Hath made in Himalayan forests wrack,  
And strewn the channels with torn boughs."

("Hyphasis or Hydaspes" savors of Milton.) The comparison is really little help to the reader. It simply says, at some length, that this trunk was "like" any trunk. Curiously enough, however, it hardly succeeds in saying even that; for we have only "boughs," "torn boughs," to furnish the required term of comparison, no "trunks" at all. How large the "torn boughs" supposed may be, we are not told. They may be of any size whatever. But the poet, as if now the reader should have no trouble in getting the right conception of the magnitude of that club, says, with evident sense of satisfaction over something difficult happily achieved, "So huge the club which Rustum lifted now."

"And struck one stroke," the poet next says. This seems to be said very pregnantly, somewhat after the manner of Milton's, "No second stroke intend," or of Tennyson's, "Would strike, and firmly, and one stroke"; but the result is so null, so ridiculous, that the phrase itself becomes the reverse of impressive. Good reason, as the sequel shows, why the stroke



should be "one," and no more. For Sohrab, as Rustom might have anticipated, especially after the experience immediately preceding, "sprang aside" again; and then happened several things very surprising. That redoubtable club came "thundering to earth." This is surprising, since the "earth" that it came to was "sand"—as such constantly described by the poet—and how should the club have "thundered" falling into the sand? Next, the club "leapt from Rustom's hand." This too is surprising, since Rustom was a warrior of such doughty character, of such mighty strength, and withal of such long seasoning experience, that he ought to have been prepared to hold his club, though his club should miss its aim. One might indeed suppose that, with presence of mind, Rustom let go his club (for this time proved useless) on purpose, as his best way of ridding himself of it. But, no, it was an accident that the club left his hand; and no wonder that it did, since his hand was mailed, and it was only with one hand, of course the right hand, that he attempted to wield it. And now, stranger still than the strange things already mentioned, that experienced warrior lost his balance and came down on all fours "following his own blow." "On all fours," for he "fell to his knees," and besides that, "with his fingers [his mailed fingers!] clutched the sand." Rustom must have quite lost his head. Why should he "clutch the sand"? To spread out his hands palm downward would have saved him far better. A vulgar evil genius at my elbow suggests that Rustom felt his own "sand" failing him, and instinctively sought to replenish his supply. Vainly I remonstrate: "Vex not thou the poet's mind with thy shallow wit,

vex not thou the poet's mind, for thou canst not fathom it." He presses his unworthy suggestion by pointing out that Rustum became "choked with sand." And true enough, it appears that, in Arnold's words, he "lay dizzy, and on his knees, and choked with sand"! The whole passage containing this statement reads:

"And now might Sohrab have unsheathed his sword  
And pierced the mighty Rustum while he lay  
Dizzy, and on his knees, and choked with sand."

(It is curious what pains Arnold takes to tell us that Rustum "*lay*," but did so "*on his knees*.") That insufferable evil genius, impudently insisting on his point, says his theory is that Rustum, clutching the sand with the purpose aforesaid, was confused through his dizziness, and so overcharged his mouth with it—whence the choking. But of course the true theory is that Rustum pitched forward with such momentum that his face ducked into the sand, and his mouth, unfortunately being open at the moment, filled itself involuntarily. Altogether it was a complicated catastrophe, and, under all the conditions existing in the case, very surprising indeed.

Yes, as the poet says, Sohrab obviously could now have dispatched his antagonist, or have made him accept life at his magnanimous enemy's hands:

"But he looked on and smiled, nor bared his sword,  
But courteously drew back, and spoke, and said,"—

A truly Quixotic knight this young man was! He "drew back," and did so "courteously," and yet—he "smiled." Did he smile courteously? It would have been more courteous to refrain from smiling. Did

Sohrab lose his gentlemanlike self-command, was he overcome with uncontrollable merriment, to see his friend, the enemy's, mishap? Why did he not cover this unhappy lapse of his in high manners, by advancing, instead of drawing back, advancing to the assistance of Rustum in regaining his feet? But perhaps it was a truer delicacy on his part to let Rustum show that he could get up without help.

By the way, this drawing-back of Sohrab is the first change of position noted on the part of either combatant. Rustum "hurled his spear," Sohrab "threw," Rustum "seized his club," and struck his "one stroke," all, so far as appears from the poem, without either one's moving either backward or forward, though Sohrab did twice spring "aside." Arnold's imagination was strangely unconcerned and inactive about all such details.

But Sohrab's smile was not a smile of amusement, as certainly it was not a smile of complaisance. It must have been a derisive smile. This is made clear by Sohrab's first words—they were taunting words—uttered when he spoke and said:

"Thou strik'st too hard! that club of thine will float  
Upon the summer-floods, and not my bones."

But how derision, expressed whether in smile or in words, could be made to comport with courtesy, it would require Arnold himself to explain.

Enough now of this. 'Too much, too much already, far too much!' I hear some reader exclaim, who, admiring Arnold and perhaps loving him, has nevertheless, however impatiently, followed me thus far. 'What good is to be looked for from such minute,

microscopic, teasing, carping criticism? How much more satisfactory, how much more truly illuminating, would be a criticism that rises to a higher point of view, that takes a free, a large, a liberal range, interprets sympathetically, inspires to generous admiration! What poetry is there that could stand question on such a rack as that of this critic? To which I reply: Any good poetry, any true poetry, could not only stand it, but come out proved all the better for the trial. Of course there is very little, if any, *perfect* poetry in the world, and therefore, in the very best that we have, some flaws could no doubt be found, should one search for them with adequately discerning eyes. But in all true poetry, the good would outweigh the bad, and, in the truest, the good would make the bad count for little, or even for almost nothing at all. No good poem could possibly yield to the most searching assay such a result as is left in our hands after a fair examination of "Sohrab and Rustum."

### III

'BUT have you not picked out the most vulnerable part of the poem for the present examination?' My answer is, I do not think so; I certainly have not meant to; the whole poem is, I believe, fairly represented by the passage that we have examined. There is indeed one place of the narrative, and that the crisis of it—the hinge on which it turns—that is even more open to fair ridicule than is the place with which we have been engaged. If the levity, or, as Arnold would say in a case concerning himself, the "vivacity,"



to which I was overcomingly tempted in treating that place, exposes me to just rebuke, I may at least, in mitigation of blame, plead the example of Arnold himself dealing critically with authors whom he disapproved. A serious problem for the poet to solve in the execution of his task was how to bring about at length that mutual recognition between the two combatants which was necessary to the final tragic and pathetic effect aimed at in the poem. It can not be denied that this was a delicate and difficult thing to manage; but a more unhappy way of managing it than that hit upon by Arnold, it would be hard to imagine. Rostum had made a great point of not being identified, or identifiable, as Rostum. He went to the combat with undistinguished armor, and he parried every attempt from Sohrab to make him acknowledge that he was indeed that redoubtable warrior. He would conquer by prowess and not by fame. But when Sohrab, after delivering two effective passes with his sword, at length stood suddenly helpless and weaponless, only the hilt of a blade that had been shattered with his last blow remaining in his hand, then Rostum, with a fine chance offered him to be as magnanimous toward his antagonist as his antagonist had been toward him, so far from availing himself of that chance—well, what can it be supposed that Rostum would do? Let the poet tell:

"Then Rostum raised his head; his dreadful eyes  
 Glared, and he shook on high his menacing spear  
 And [can it be believed?] shouted, 'Rostum!'"

Why he shouted "Rostum!" does not appear. It could hardly have been to reveal himself in his true identity, for to be unknown was a condition upon

which he had insisted throughout—at least until now, and now there was less reason than before for making himself known; he had his antagonist helpless at his mercy. Was “Rustum!” his usual battle-cry? Then why had he not used it before, or, rather, since he had not used it before, why should he use it now? It seems idle to conjecture. It could not have been to strike terror to Sohrab’s heart, and so render him an easier prey to his spear. He was prey easy enough already. It seems like a pure freak of pure savagery—that shout, “Rustum!” It has the effect of bathos as absolute as possible—to the reflective reader. But to Sohrab it had a very different effect. It unnerved him. Not with panic fear. Not with a sudden conviction of the shout’s meaning that this was Rustum, his father. No, for, just after, with Rustum’s spear deep in his side, Sohrab exclaims, “Unknown thou art.” The young warrior was unnerved, so he himself says, simply by the sound of the name “Rustum” issuing from his antagonist’s throat! This is the way in which he says it:

“Thou dost not slay me, proud and boastful man!  
No! Rustum slays me, and this filial heart.”

Then the fatally-wounded man becomes himself “boastful,” and says:

“For, were I matcht with ten such men as thee [thou]  
And I were that which till to-day I was,  
They should be lying here, I standing there,  
But that beloved name unnerved my arm”—

The climax of Arnold’s narrative is the climax of his mismanagement. But it is unnecessary to pursue farther the critical analysis of it.

## IV

It may be asked now, Granted that plot and narrative were out of Arnold's true line, yet is there not true poetry in the descriptions, and in the various similes interspersed through the text? A fair question; let us answer it fairly.

It happens that there immediately follows upon what has already been shown the longest, the most ambitious, the most elaborate, effort in the way of simile that the poem contains. I quote it:

“As when some hunter in the spring hath found  
 A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,  
 Upon the craggy isle of a hill-lake,  
 And pierced her with an arrow as she rose,  
 And followed her to find her where she fell  
 Far off; anon her mate comes winging back  
 From hunting, and a great way off descries  
 His huddling young left sole; at that, he checks  
 His pinion, and with short, uneasy sweeps  
 Circles above his eyry, with loud screams  
 Chiding his mate back to her nest; but she  
 Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,  
 In some far stony gorge out of his ken,  
 A heap of fluttering feathers—never more  
 Shall the lake glass her, flying over it;  
 Never the black and dripping precipices  
 Echo her stormy scream as she sails by—  
 As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss,  
 So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood  
 Over his dying son, and knew him not.”

Is not that fine? I am asked. There are fine things in it, I reply; but no, that considered as a whole is

not fine, is indeed far from fine; it is even sharply the very reverse of fine. "The black and dripping precipices," "her stormy scream," are fine descriptive phrases; "a heap of fluttering feathers" is a phrase fine in a modified sense, simply because it is effective. But now consider the passage as a whole. Its ostensible reason of existing in its place is to illustrate a situation in the narrative. Does it happily serve this illustrative purpose? Look attentively through the passage, and what points of resemblance do you discover between the circumstances of the one case and the circumstances of the other? Are there *any* points of resemblance, except that in each case there is a victim dying with a missile weapon infixd in the side? And yet this sole point of resemblance is neglected by the poet, when he comes to the turn of his simile, and the whole complex mechanism that he has constructed is employed to tell us that, as the male eagle does not know his mate is dying in a distant glen, so Rustum does not know that it is his son dying at his feet! Was there ever anything in poetry at once more ambitious and more nugatory?

I make no account of the broken syntax in Arnold's long sentence, which those who will may regard as "noble negligence," but I feel that I must point out the extremely inartistic manner in which the poet contrives to divide and distract both the attention and the sympathy of the reader, and this, through the introduction of matters not at all pertinent to his own true purpose. First, there is a hunter introduced who "hath found" a mother eagle "sitting on her nest" "and [hath] pierced her with an arrow as she rose [note the awkward sequence of the tense in "rose"] and [hath]



followed her to find her where she fell far off"—which is the last of the "hunter." Next, the mother eagle's mate comes in for a share of the reader's attention. This mate "wings" back and, "a great way off" (instead of "far off" as just before), describes what again divides the reader's attention, namely, "his huddling young left sole." "His huddling young" seems to be a plural expression; could several eaglets huddling together be properly described as "sole"? But perhaps the poet's nice taste forbade him the alliteration of "left lone" or "left lorn." The male eagle is "a great way off" when he gets this view. What does he accordingly do? Why, "at that he checks his pinion"—was he flying with one pinion?—and by simply "*checking*" his pinion he, singularly enough, traverses the long intervening distance and arrives immediately at a point directly above the nest, and there "circles" about it, "with loud screams chiding his mate back to her nest"—which is the last of him, until, six lines later, he is for the moment returned to. Meantime, the reader is invited by the poet to consider the sad fate of the mother bird, pathetically presented through those six intervening lines. Finally, it comes out that, as the dying mother eagle's mate does not know that she is dying, so Rustum does not know who it is that is dying at his feet! By the way, I have never had opportunity to observe the habits of eagles, but to my imagination it does not seem likely that an eagle in the course of flight, soft, smooth, equable, enough to be described as "sailing," would be uttering a "*stormy* scream." How would "sweeps by" do, instead of "sails by," if there must be a "stormy scream" meanwhile?

I have just now looked afresh through the poem, from beginning to end, with a view to considering carefully whether there were any good similes in it. I found a noticeably large number of similes, but among them all only one that strikes me as good, and that one is not, to my mind, more than passably good. Almost all of them are forced and unapt—some of them are remarkably so. Take this, for example; the poet is setting forth how glad the Persians were to see Rustum appear as their champion against Sohrab:

“And dear as the wet diver to the eyes  
Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,  
By sandy Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf,  
Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,  
Having made up his tale of precious pearls,  
Rejoins her in their hut upon the sands—  
So dear to the pale Persians Rustum came.”

It is really extraordinary to see Arnold go so far and fetch so little. Probably he was so well pleased at having hit upon something that would seem to fit, as happily harmonious in point of local color, that he neglected to see how what he had hit upon was recommended by nothing else than simply that. The professional diver's wife would not stay “pale,” would not “wait and weep on shore,” *habitually*, as it is implied that she would, while her husband was plying his vocation, “plunging all day in the blue waves.” Curiously enough, according to the syntax of the passage, it is the “pale wife” that does the “plunging,” as it is also the “pale wife” that “rejoins her”—“rejoins” having no other grammatical subject than “who” preceding, and that “who” meaning the wife. But of course we know what the poet means, although

at the same time we know he does not say what he means. Why, since the wife is "on shore," does not the husband rejoin her there? Why should he send her into the "hut," or why should she go thither unsent, in order to have the happy reunion take place indoors? But perhaps "on shore" means only 'on the land.'

Now, no longer delayed by faults of form, let us consider the substance of the simile. What are the resemblances that make it fit and felicitous? The wife is "pale," though we do not see why she should be, and the Persians are "pale," though we do not see why they should be; indeed, the paleness of the Persians is even more an improbability than is the paleness of the woman. However, the two parties are somehow "pale," and that constitutes one resemblance; in the end both parties are pleased, and that constitutes another resemblance. This latter resemblance is the only one made use of by the poet; the simile accordingly reduces itself to this: As one party is pleased, so is the other. The differences between the two cases are very wide. In the first case the party is one, and a woman; in the second case the party is a numerous host, composed exclusively of men. In the first case, the relief experienced is relief from anxiety on behalf of another; in the second case, the relief experienced is relief from anxiety on the party's own behalf. In the first case, the element of personal affection plays an important part; in the second place, the element of personal affection can not be supposed to enter at all. Considering the other characters involved, we note that, in the first case, the party is a diver who has been endangered, and who escapes, "wet"; in the second case, the party is a warrior who has as yet cer-

tainly incurred no danger, and who comes forth supposably quite dry. It may, I think, justly be said that *any* example whatever of relief from anxiety, afforded by the opportune appearing of some one, would form as good a basis for a simile appropriate to the occasion created here by the poem as is the example invented by Arnold. In short, simile-making, the divining of similitudes, is decidedly not Arnold's strong point.

## V

'AT any rate,' it may be said, 'there is the famous concluding passage of the poem—you will concede that that is fine, will you not, more than fine, truly magnificent?' Alas, and alas, why should I, with question upon question such, be teased and tempted into exhibiting myself quite without critical mercy? Since challenged so, I must, I suppose, continue to be frank. Briefly and abruptly, then, to say the worst at once and have it over, no, I can not admit this famous passage to be worthy of its fame. It has merit, but its merit is not that of high poetry, nor even that of good literary art. What it essentially is, must be set down as nothing better than a bit of fluvial geography couched in musical, and sometimes poetical, blank verse. I assume that the geography is accurate; I have not made an independent study of it, but apparently the poet did this, and I shall not raise any question as to the trustworthiness of his result.

"But the majestic river floated on,  
Out of the mist and hum of that low land"—



so Arnold starts his concluding strain, with evident purpose to have a pensively soothing contrast to the bloody scene that has just been enacted on the Oxus shore—by presenting to us the impassive river pursuing its course unmindful of the human tragedy it has witnessed. I ought to explain that the “hum” in the case was “as of a great assembly *loosed*,” for now “Both armies moved to camp and took their meal”—a casual and temporary “hum” therefore, but Arnold mentions it here as if, like the “mist,” it affected the landscape by the operation of nature. Simply exclaiming as I pass, “mist and *hum*”!—the combination! —“hum”!—and then remarking that rivers in general do not “float,” and that doubtless the “majestic” Oxus was no exception to the rule, I point out that there were two different ways open to the choice of the poet in which to conceive and represent the flowing of the river, in connection with his now concluded narrative. One way was to conceive and represent it as it would appear observed by a person on the bank, say, a sympathetic bystander near the prostrate forms of the dead son and the mourning father. The other way was to conceive and represent it as it would appear observed by a person floating down-stream on the bosom of the river to its mouth. The poet mistakenly chose the latter of these two ways. The effect is to detach the river at once from all relation to the narrative of the poem, and to engage the reader in a series of observations on the various fortunes that befall the stream on its way to the sea. In other words, that which alone could justify any such attention from the poet as he here bestows on the river—namely, its relation to his narrative—is quite forgotten by him, and the famous

conclusion of "Sohrab and Rustum" becomes an unrelated mere geographical description, with no artistic right to its place where it stands—ostensibly *in* the poem, but really outside it, being not at all *of* it.

If, on the other hand, Arnold had chosen the way that he did not choose, of conceiving and representing the flowing of the river, one can easily imagine a perfectly legitimate gently pathetic effect produced by a meditative strain dwelling on the everlasting æonian lapse of the waters, forever and forever the same, unaffected by what might befall, whether of good or of ill, to human kind, on the sandy shore, which, with full current or slack, from season to season, they assiduously and impassively wash. But instead of being thus set to musing on eternity, symbolized in the monotonous, unending, solemn flow of the great river, and contrasted with the fragility and evanescence of human life and its subjection to all vicissitudes of chance and change, the reader is started off on a voyage down the length of the stream, with a personal conductor at his side poetically pointing out the features of the various channels into which the current divides itself, and the aspects of the landscapes through which it passes on its "foiled circuitous" wandering to the sea.

It is fair to note that in this passage as it stands, there are fine touches, touches of a true poetic quality. "Under the solitary moon," is such a touch. So is, "the hushed Chorasmian waste." "Bright speed," would be, but that it is hindered by the inharmonious context, "the bright speed he had in his high mountain cradle." "Speed" in a "cradle" seems not happy. That the adjective "bright" should occur three

times in the passage may be set down to the account of an Homeric carelessness about such repetitions; but the passage as a whole is very un-Homeric. Apropos of the adjective just named, I can not refrain from admiring exceedingly a phrase that comes earlier in the poem and has in it subtly something of both the brilliance attributed to the sea and the oscillating motion picturesquely described:

"As the vast tide  
Of the *bright rocking ocean* sets to shore  
At the full moon."

## VI

IF the present paper were a review of Arnold's poetry, this examination of "Sohrab and Rostum" would, though far from complete, yet be, out of all proper proportion, long. But this paper is not a review of Arnold's poetry. It is simply an assay by specimen of his verse, undertaken for the determination of his true quality as poet. It behooves me, however, to remember that a poet may fail comparatively in epic attempt and, comparatively at least, succeed in lyric or other kinds of verse. Let us, then, seek by a further series of assays to arrive at a just evaluation of Arnold's poetic production not epic.

I will begin with one of the "Early Poems"—pieces so designated in the authoritative collective edition of Arnold's verse. I make the selection that I do chiefly for the reason that what I select contains a line which has had the fortune to become famous and familiar. The piece is a sonnet addressed by the poet "To a Friend." It starts off

“Who prop, thou ask'st, in these bad days, my mind?”

“What a line!” so I can not forbear at once abruptly exclaiming. How could a man with any ear at all for music in verse produce it—or tolerate it, supposed self-produced as a first desperate fling at expression? Monosyllabic, heavily so, spondaic, heavily so, clogged with pauses, convulsive with guttural and sibilant stutter in one unpronounceable word, “ask'st”—it is, with one possible exception, the worst line I know in English verse. This, as a matter of mere sound. As a matter of expression, what could well be worse than “who prop” for the start of a question such as the one here propounded? “In these bad days”—a note of querulousness belonging, one feels, to the poet himself, if also to the inquiring “friend,” and half un-genuine with the morbidity of youth.

Now for the answer that the poet gives to the question propounded in that first line: “He much, the old man,” Arnold says; but how does Arnold know that Homer was characteristically “old”? “Who, clearest-souled of men, Saw the Wide Prospect and the Asian Fen”—“the Wide Prospect” being a pedantically derived designation of “Europe,” as “Asian Fen” is a designation violently obtained, through doubtful etymology, for “Asia”—these freaks both of them in a *poem* from a poet who, as critic, ridicules Ruskin for etymologizing on Shakespeare's proper names in his *prose*! But how barren, to say that Homer “saw” both Europe and Asia though he was blind! Homer then much “propped” Arnold's “mind.” So did Epictetus, who, with like periphrasis, is designated, without being named. With still more elaborate



periphrasis and indirection is mentioned Sophocles, as entitled to the poet's "special thanks," and now enters the famous familiar line:

"Who saw life steadily and saw it whole."

Just what this oft-quoted line means is not to me, I confess, altogether clear. If, in its first part, it means, "Who saw life sanely, justly, truly," then "steadily" seems not to be quite the right adverb to express that meaning. If it means, "Who saw life calmly, serenely, imperturbably," still the adverb "steadily" seems not exactly apt. If, in its second part, it means, "And saw it comprehensively," then, "saw it whole" is a somewhat forced, unnatural, infelicitous turn of phrase to express that idea. Altogether it is, I think, rather by accident than by merit that the line has gained its acceptance and currency. I say this without intending thus far to imply any opinion as to the truth of the characterization that the line furnishes of the genius of Sophocles. But was he such as he is thus represented to have been? How can we know that he was such? Are not seven surviving tragedies, out of the hundred or more works of his—there being little trustworthy tradition extant about him, and part at least of what there is not being very favorable to his seeing life "steadily"—a slender basis to support such a characterization—which might be supposed to suit Shakespeare better? These are questions that suggest themselves, but I do not attempt to answer them.

If Arnold's friend Clough had asked Arnold what Greek writers he was just now engaging himself with, as a diversion of his mind during a season of depress-

ing weather, then for Arnold to couch his answer in the form of a sonnet propounding these riddles, not too hard to solve, would have been a pardonable play of fancy and of art, and there would be nothing to criticize except the manner in which the thing was done. But if, on the other hand, Arnold was seriously asked what writers in the whole realm of literature he found to yield the best support to his mind disposed, during days of surrounding darkness—no good “criticism” going!—to sink depressed under the “heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world,” then, for the poet to reply seriously that Homer, Epictetus, and Sophocles, especially Sophocles, were his great sources of sustaining power—that staggers one considering it thoughtfully. As a resort for healthful diversion of the mind—“being as I am oppressed,” Arnold might say, using the words of his master—yes, that were reasonable perhaps, but as a “prop”? For myself, I must acknowledge that it is my best way of regarding the confession of this sonnet to regard it as a bit of mere dilettante affectation on the youthful poet’s part. That, at least is the view of it which seems to me the most favorable to Arnold that can be taken.

That impossible first line of the sonnet goes far to show that Arnold’s ear must have been naturally, and so of course incurably, wanting in nice faculty for feeling the effect of sound. Surely, if this were not the case, he would at least not have been guilty of “ask’st,” when so simple a device was at hand for avoiding it. He had only to say “you ask,” instead of “thou ask’st”; and, irrespective of sound, the substitution would have improved the line, as more in

consonance with epistolary familiarity and freedom of expression.

Arnold is much praised for his urbanity. This must be because he preached urbanity (which, indeed, he did pronouncedly), rather than because he practised it. In a different sonnet, also inscribed "To a Friend," with the date "1848" prefixed, he uses language implying very high esteem for the person addressed; yet in a succeeding sonnet, inscribed "To the Same Friend," this prophet of urbanity, still himself in his early manhood, assumes the schoolmaster and bids the person addressed "control wishes unworthy of a man full-grown"! A queer notion of urbanity that exemplifies; or is it the present writer that has his notion of urbanity queer?

If there were need of confirmation for the view that I have taken of Arnold's endowment in the way of instinctive sense of sound in word and phrase, confirmation would be supplied in a later, mature poem of his, which, as it also happens to contain a famous line, it will be to our purpose to examine. (At this point it will be fair to display a friendly warning signal. The examination now to be entered upon of this particular lyric attempt of Arnold's will be long and tedious enough to be judiciously skipped by all readers except those who take a sincere and intelligent interest in the vital laws and principles presiding over the production of true poetry. Dr. Johnson, writing Pope's life, exercised his admirable good sense by arresting himself in the exhibition, evidently very interesting to him, of the processes through which Pope's verse, in the translation of Homer, passed on its way to be the singularly finished product which, under the

hand of that endlessly painstaking artist, it finally became. After presenting a considerable number of trial alternative readings from Pope of a celebrated passage, Johnson says: "Most other readers [than "poets and philosophers"] are already tired, and I am not writing only to poets and philosophers." And so he stayed his hand. I do not stay my hand, but instead I offer readers a fair chance to stay their eye for a little and refrain from pursuing closely the necessarily long-drawn-out technical criticism here immediately to follow.) The poem now referred to is in a series of poems collectively entitled "Switzerland," and it is the second one of two poems inscribed "To Marguerite." Marguerite is not, I believe, identified with any real person, and she is accordingly best regarded as an ideal creation of the poet's fancy. Still these two poems have in them warmth as of passion, to a degree beyond the average of Arnold's not very glowing poetical production. From a particular individual experience, which Marguerite shares with the poet, of inevitable mutual isolation, this second poem proceeds to generalize, and produce the observation that all human lives universally are doomed to the same mutual isolation. Perhaps the etymology of the word "isolation," used by Arnold as a title to the first of the two poems, suggested the metaphor taken up by the poet and run on into a kind of allegory which, in fact, constitutes the poem.

"Yes! in the sea of life enisled,"

the piece begins. One suspects that the poet was enamored of his coinage "enisled," which has, indeed, a certain prettiness, if not even a certain distinction.



He might have said, "in the sea of being isled," which would perhaps have better expressed what ought to have been his real thought. The syntax is interrupted, and therewith the sense suspended, by two intervening lines, before we reach the line that enables us to divine the meaning aimed at, which, however, comes out plainly in the fourth line:

"We mortal millions live *alone*."

(The italics are Arnold's.) Until we do reach this fourth line, and even after that, we are, for a moment, doubtful what is the reference of one of the participles. Here are the four lines shown together:

"Yes! in the sea of life enisled,  
With echoing straits between us thrown,  
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,  
We mortal millions live *alone*."

It is easy at first to understand the meaning to be that the "echoing straits" "dot" the "wild"; but it is of course "we" that do the "dotting." Now that word "dotting" here is the unmistakable sign of true imagination lacking. It would answer well enough if it were a bird's-eye view that the poet wished us to take of the "sea of life." But that would be a view proper to a detached, superior observer looking down disinterestedly upon the great human archipelago. But by the very idea of the poem, "we" are now, all of us, hopelessly "enisled"; we are all of us conceived as conditioned so that we can not see ourselves "dotting" the "sea of life." One individual selected from among us "mortal millions" might conceivably look down upon his fellows as dots in the sea. But the poet has

got us *all* without exception "enised," isolated, and, while we are thus "dotting" the sea, it is bad art to represent us as also seeing ourselves dotting. We can not at one and the same time dot the sea and behold ourselves dotting it. Perhaps it would be sufficient, as it would be simpler, to say that the "dotting" line inartistically changes without notice the point of view. The enisement, from being an experience described, becomes a spectacle to be beheld. That is to say, it is no longer our own experience which is treated—the experience of people "enised," and therefore intimately concerned in the isolation resulting—but the impression made upon a detached observer occupying an elevated position and taking a bird's-eye view of a scene outspread beneath him, the scene, namely, of us "mortal millions" "dotting" an expanse, which is not now the "sea of life," but a "shoreless *watery* wild." "With echoing straits between us thrown," seems a line introduced for the purpose of providing a rhyme for the word "alone" to follow, word so necessary to the expression of the poet's master idea. Surely Arnold would not, except under technical compulsion, have submitted to have watery "straits" "*thrown*" either "between us" or, for that matter, anywhere else. The word "echoing" has its justification, if indeed it has any justification, in implying that "we mortal millions," though "enised," yet can communicate with one another across the intervening "straits." But Arnold should have regretted being, as it were, obliged to admit thus the circumstance of intercommunication possible, to alleviate that "isolation" which it was the very motive of the poem to affirm and emphasize. And the word "echoing" serves ill

the purpose for which it was introduced. One has to divine too much.

"The islands feel the enclasping flow,  
And then their endless bounds they know."

Here it is doubtful whether "islands" is used to mean "the" literal geographical islands—which certainly are meant in the next two stanzas, and part of the fourth and last—or the figurative islands that are "we." What precedes apparently requires that it should be "we"; what follows apparently requires that it should be the real geographical islands. "Endless" seems used, with some violence, to mean "enduring," "everlasting."

"But when the moon their hollows lights,"

is the first line of the second stanza, and now, beyond question, we have real physical islands before us. "Their hollows lights"—what a combination and succession of sounds for a poet to permit!—"lows lights" is, in fact, nearly as bad in cacophany, as "thou ask'st." Those two cacophonies alone are decisive against Arnold's ear for music in verse. But why should the moon light only the "hollows" (unhappy word) of those islands?

"And they are swept by balms of spring"—

Properly these two fixations of time, "moon" and "spring," should change places with each other. "Balms of spring" are influences too mild, too bland, to be happily represented as "sweeping" either the islands or the hollows of the islands.

"And in their glens on starry nights"—

a pretty, even a sufficiently beautiful, line, but one

who desiderates perfect art can not help wondering whether the "glens" here are conceived to be different from the moonlit "hollows" before spoken of, also whether the "starry nights" here are different nights from those previously spoken of as illumined by the moon. The fourth line now following comes in with a sudden surprise of real beauty that is quite enchanting. It needs to be led up to. Forget now the little flaws that have been pointed out in them, and read these four lines together:

"But when the moon their hollows lights  
And they are swept by balms of spring,  
And in their glens, on starry nights,  
*The nightingales divinely sing.*"

Could anything be finer than those four words in their place? Those four words in their place, simple, common, as they are, compose what is, for me, the finest single line that I remember in all Arnold's verse. That line irresistibly recalls an exquisite similar line of the "In Memoriam"; one can not help wondering whether there was not, unconsciously to Arnold, some genetic relation of Tennyson's line to his own:

"On Argive heights *divinely sang.*"

Two lines,

"And lovely notes, from shore to shore,  
Across the sounds and channels pour,"

complete the stanza—after which the poet proceeds to tell how, under the conditions described, those sentimental islands wish they were again come together into one continent as they originally subsisted. Of course there is allegory in this, and the allegory persists to the end of the poem. Those islands—which



obscurely are "we"—have to remain apart. This has been decreed:

"A God, a God, their severance ruled,  
And bade betwixt their shores to be  
*The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea.*"

I italicize the famous line—concerning which Mr. Saintsbury uses this language: "One of the great poetic phrases of the century—one of the jewels five [literally five!] words long of English verse—a phrase complete and final, with epithets in unerring cumulation"; and Mr. Herbert W. Paul, this language: "Can hardly be surpassed for curious felicity in the English if in any language."

As to these critical expressions, I have this to say: Mr. Saintsbury, as soon as he ceases to use the language of mere praise, and passes over to the language of ostensibly discriminative critical appreciation, betrays himself, with a really curious accurate antithesis to what is incontestably the truth. Whatever merit Arnold's line has, it, at any rate, has not the merit of "*epithets in unerring cumulation.*" Is it possible that Mr. Saintsbury soberly thinks that the epithet "salt" is an "unerring" rise on the epithet "unplumbed" as predicate of the sea? Mr. Saintsbury (and Mr. Paul as well) treats the line independently of its connection with the context in which it stands in Arnold's poem; as if, therefore, it was a "curious felicity" of phrase for description in general of the sea. "Unplumbed," however, is by no means true of the sea in general. The sea, in fact, has been very widely sounded. But the adjective is no more true of the sea conceived of as Arnold conceives of it in this poem than it is of the great and wide sea in general. If it be replied, 'The

adjective is not to be taken absolutely in its strict sense; it means simply "deep, very deep;" then to that I rejoin, 'Great depth as an attribute of the sea, is not very happily expressed by 'unplumbed,' which, besides, is a word of no true musical value for verse, while, still further, depth in the sea has no relation at all to the effect really sought by the poet in his line, and at last reached in "estranging." Depth in the sea does not contribute at all to the "estranging" effect—except that it does forbid communication by wading! The same may be said of saltiness in the sea. So far off is any "unerring cumulation" in the epithets. Curious infelicity may be predicated of the line much more truly than "curious felicity." It is very infelicitous to sandwich the adjective "salt" between, on the one side, an adjective relating to depth, and, on the other side, an adjective relating to supposed antisocial, alienating effect. In short, the line, in spite of its fame and its currency, is a distinctly bad line. And, in its place in the poem, it is bad for yet another, and a more vital, reason. It rests its emphasis on "estranging"; but the islands are, in fact, though indeed separated, not at all "estranged," for they have, according to the poet, especially on moonlit or starry nights, a strong yearning toward one another. So, too, the sea in general does not estrange, though it separates. Let us try to see things as they really are. Those of my readers who do this will, I am satisfied, come to think as I do of the poem, and especially of its closing line. Those, on the other hand, who, instead of working intelligently out an opinion of their own, *choose* their opinion, and choose according to the apparent weight of critical authority,

on this side or on that, will of course concur with Mr. Saintsbury, Mr. Paul, and the rest.

Will it be welcome as a help to those among my readers who may feel it safer to side with the majority of supposedly authoritative critics, if I show them here a really thoroughgoing favorable appreciation of this famous line? I have been fortunate enough to light upon such an appreciation, and here it is. This critic does not timidly limit himself to general mere superlatives of praise; he is at pains to show why he praises. After declaring that our great line is "inexhaustible in beauty and force," he proceeds to demonstrate that this is truly the case. He says: "It shadows out to you the plunging deep-sea lead, and the eery cry of 'no sounding,' recalls that saltiness of the sea which takes from water every refreshing association, every quality that helps to slake thirst or supply sap, and then concentrates all these dividing attributes which strike a sort of lonely terror into the soul, into the one word, 'estranging.'" Rejoicing in what he has thus done for the line, he adds, with confidence that may to some be contagious: "It is a line full of intensity, simplicity, and grandeur—a line to possess and haunt the imagination."

The critic who thus exploited his own capacity to criticize adequately, found his organ of publicity for his views in *Blackwood's Magazine*. He seems to have been intent on putting it beyond any possible doubt that, great as the line is, he at least comprehended its greatness. We can imagine him, plummet in hand, standing, struck with "a sort of lonely terror," beside the line, then, having dropped the "deep-sea lead" into its depths, uttering, awed, "the eery cry,

‘No sounding’”! The adjective “salt” does not balk this critic. That adjective has its place and power in the “unerring cumulation” of epithets, because the “saltness of the sea” “takes from water every refreshing association”—“every quality that helps to slake thirst or *supply sap*”! “All these dividing attributes” are gathered up and concentrated into the one word, “estranging”! There you have appreciative criticism every way worthy of what is criticized. We need go no further. *That* is “complete and final”!

I beg to recommend to the reader that he recur for a moment to the text of the preposterous critical appreciation just now remarked upon, and consider whether, taken as unintentional somewhat laborious irony, it would not serve very well the purpose of a *reductio ad absurdum* for the merit and the value of Arnold’s famous line. Here is the text, printed again, but this time without interruption of comment, that the reader’s attention may be quite undistracted:

“It [the line in question] shadows out to you the plunging deep-sea lead, and the eery cry of ‘no sounding,’ recalls that saltness of the sea which takes from water every refreshing association, every quality that helps to slake thirst or supply sap, and then concentrates all these dividing attributes which strike a sort of lonely terror into the soul, into the one word, ‘estranging.’”

It will be observed that hitherto we have been considering the poem exclusively from the point of view of its imaginative truth and of its technical merit. Now what is to be said of the value of the poem from the point of view of its substance in thought? Has it true value in this respect? Its thought is contained



in the line, "We mortal millions live *alone*." This thought—it is thought attenuated into sentiment rather—makes, no doubt, successful appeal to a certain class of persons, of whom the sentimental schoolgirl may be taken as a suitable type. These persons read, "We mortal millions live *alone!*" and exclaim, "How true that is!" They might not inappropriately go on and, with a "far-away" look in their eyes, or with their eyes closed as in voluntary self-detachment, and feeling themselves "enised," sigh, in Coleridge's words, "Alone, alone, all, all alone, Alone on the deep, deep sea!" But, if you should ask them, 'Are you any more "alone" than you and your neighbors mutually agree to be, and than your existence, and theirs, as separate personalities, compels,' they would have to admit that they were not. The complete merging of us "mortal millions" in one universal huge human personality, would be the only proper antithesis to such "alone"-ness as is lamented about in the poem. Except that individual wills would be lost in such a merging, I think that, if such a merging were once realized in fact, the component personalities merged would, every one of them, sigh to get back to their former state, and to be happily "*alone*" again—with the word uttered as strong in good italics as the poet himself could desire! In short, the idea of this poem is of pretty accurately equal genuineness and value with the poetic form given it by Arnold.

Of course from this evaluation, on my part, of the poem it will readily appear that in my opinion it is in itself far from being worthy of such serious criticism as has been expended upon it. I have nevertheless devoted to it such criticism, because it is fairly repre-

sentative of Arnold's short poems in general, and because it is famous on account of that one line in it; for these reasons it seemed to me that it might well furnish the occasion for exhibiting somewhat exhaustively the inherent and inseparable qualities that almost everywhere affect Arnold's verse and render it unworthy of the estimation in which reputable critical authorities hold it.

## VII

AFTER such a sentence from the present writer of sweeping disparagement, the fair-minded reader will inevitably ask, 'Does then this critic really think that no true poetic value whatever will remain, after duly searching assay, in the whole volume of Arnold's production in verse?' I have already said "No" to that pardonably petulant question, for I have singled out lines and phrases from the poet and presented them for what I feel to be deserved admiration. But I can go farther, and with all sincerity say that one poem at least seems to me, not merely for things in it, but for itself as a whole, a true poem. I wish I could conscientiously say this of certain other pieces that are objects of much conventional applause. "Thyrsis," for example, Arnold's threnody for his friend Arthur Hugh Clough—I most sincerely wish I could bring myself to admire that, even nearly to the height of current estimation. I can not. For one thing, Arnold has written himself too much into the poem. Of course a large element of himself was admissible, was even required; but he permitted this element to become too

large. The question of more or less, however, is here a very nice one, and I simply note my own feeling that the right proportion was not quite perfectly observed by the threnodist. There is too much local description in the poem, written in relation rather to the poet himself than to the friend he was lamenting. "Who, if not I," Arnold asks, "for questing here hath power?" Then follow a series of claims on his own behalf, "I know the wood," "I know the Fyfield tree," "I know what white," "I know these slopes"; "who knows them if not I?" he strongly insists. He seems to descend below the true pitch when he begins the next stanza, "Where is the girl," continuing it with, "Where are the mowers"; and also when he ends it, with really extraordinary flatness, by recurring to Thyrsis in the words, "They [namely, "the girl" and "the mowers"] all are gone, and thou art gone as well." The stanza next following is an outright entrance of the poet himself into his poem, taking the form of pensive consciousness and regret that he is sensibly growing old. This egoistic reference continues through the stanza that succeeds, and the poet finds no better way of making subsequently a transition than abruptly to exclaim, "But hush! the upland hath a sudden loss of quiet." He will escape the tumult of certain "Oxford hunters going home." He urges haste upon himself, saying, "Quick! let me fly and cross Into yon farther field!" "'Tis done," he says, which certainly is one note of undeniable simplicity, although the poem in general is not simple enough. The artificial pastoral strain and the frankly academic are inartistically alternated the one with the other. And that strange unreality, the "scholar-gypsy," is permitted to

intrude. Altogether, the "Thyrsis," although it does undoubtedly have investing it a certain atmosphere of charm, is not as a whole a fine poem.

I have mentioned the "scholar-gypsy"—which naturally suggests a remark or two about a somewhat considerable poem of Arnold's bearing that double word for title. "The Scholar-Gypsy" is founded on what seems to one not an Oxonian a remarkably barren and empty legend, a legend accordingly ill worthy to be honored with serious attempt at a rendering and moralizing in verse. Arnold's poem fully answers in merit to the unsatisfactory character of its subject. It concludes with a very elaborate simile, carried through two stanzas, a simile as ineffective as it is elaborate. I believe this simile staggers even the sworn admirers of Arnold as poet.

"Still nursing the unconquerable hope,  
Still clutching the inviolable shade"—

are two lines in the poem which seem, if one may safely judge from allusions to them occurring here and there in literature, to exert a subtle, magical effect upon some minds. You will occasionally hear or see them repeated with an apparent passion of occult enjoyment, as if they were felt to express something that had never been at all comparably well-expressed before. You had better not ask what that something is; you would be looked upon with pity, and other answer none would you get. The syntax of the stanza throws little light on the meaning. You read the stanza through and find that the legendary scholar-gypsy, recognized as "still nursing" the "hope," hope referred-to but not stated, also as "still clutching" the



"shade," shade referred-to but by no means identified for you, is at length in the seventh line bidden "emerge" and "freshen" his "flowers" "with dew," or "listen" "to the nightingales"—apparently quite according to his individual preference in the matter. Very elusive are those two lines, but let us candidly admit that they unquestionably are keyed to "the grand style" and that they do sound as if they might mean something quite inexpressible, but truly fine. "The Scholar-Gypsy" must be accounted a second example of Arnold's infelicity in choice of subject for verse.

"Westminster Abbey" is a tribute to the memory of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, dean of Westminster. Relatively to the poet, at least, the subject in this case was worthy of arduous poetical treatment at his hands, for not only was Stanley, like Clough, a personal friend of Arnold's, but he had commemorated Arnold's father in a loyally written biography of that great teacher. It was a happy inspiration for Arnold to entitle his poem as he did, without expressly naming his personal subject. The idea of his poem was boldly to convert the whole majestic medieval pile, as it were, into a memorial of Stanley. Stanley was, in Arnold's representation, that late "light" which at last fulfilled the symbolic prophecy found by the poet in a certain ancient legend concerning the way in which Westminster Abbey was in the beginning miraculously consecrated. This, regarded from Arnold's own point of view, must be conceded to be a fine constructive idea for the poem. It is, in fact, as it ought to be, the chief merit of the production. Unfortunately, the legend was so little known that the poet had to tell it

in his poem, and it was of such a nature that he had to tell it at disproportionate length. Then, in order to prepare the way for the poetic interpretation intended of the legend, Arnold has a querulous stanza or two lamenting the darkness that long supervened to defeat the promise of light interpreted by him into the legendary consecration of the Abbey. "Yet in this latter time The promise of the prime Seem'd to come true at last, O Abbey old!" the poet says. "It seem'd," he goes on to say, and one wonders a little that, holding the point of view he did, Arnold should have emphasized by repetition the idea of "seeming"—"It seem'd a child of light did bring the dower Foreshown thee in thy consecration-hour, And in thy courts his shining freight unroll'd." "Freight unroll'd" is a sadly overweighted expression for the idea to be expressed, but the "shining freight" is well described in the four lines following, which nobly idealize the quality of Stanley:

"Bright wits, and instincts sure,  
And goodness warm, and truth without alloy,  
And temper sweet, and love of all things pure,  
And joy in light, and power to spread the joy."

After the writing of the four fine lines thus shown, a misfortune befell the poet. For, he tells us, "on that countenance bright, Shone oft so high a light," that he, the poet, was reminded of a bit of out-of-the-way mythology which lured him into a somewhat pedantic divagation lasting through three or four following stanzas. Here is the very awkward line in which the poet relates what I venture to call his "misfortune":

"Shone oft so high a light,  
That to my mind there came how, long ago"—

"There came how"!—to introduce the pagan myth about a certain child that missed becoming immortal through the very natural concern of his mother leading her to pluck her boy from flames, that would have tempered him to immortality—had she but known! The use made by Arnold of this mythology is to ask whether some similar "check" intervened to keep the child Stanley from living forever! Thereupon comes a stanza which reads quite too much like a medical man's official report of Stanley's sickness and death—it is so bald and so detailed. Another mythologic Greek allusion which Arnold has to explain in a note furnishes the matter of a stanza succeeding, wherein the poet manages to rally and be contented with death closing such a life. "What had our Arthur gained," he asks, "to stop and see, After light's term, a term of cecity?" "To stop," in the sense of "to stay"—? "Cecity!" "Blindness," even if you call it "cecity," is no proper contrary of "light"—and then, above all in a poem—"cecity"!

Arnold had his own peculiar sense to convey when he wrote "cecity." He adds a line which may be regarded as epexegetical of the word. ("Epexegetical," I hope, will be tolerated in prose, in connection with "cecity" in poetry!) "A Church once large and then grown strait in soul" is the line. Arnold seemed to anticipate a successor to Stanley as dean of Westminster who would be less liberal than Stanley. It can hardly be supposed that this hint from Arnold of such apprehension on his part had any individual personal aim. For him so to insinuate would be too gross a

violation of urbanity. Probably the poet here simply betrayed his interest in having religion and religious institutions liberalized as much as possible. Stanley was his ideal liberalizer. This appears very plainly in a letter written by Arnold in French (which I venture to translate) to an extremely advanced French liberal:

“At present, before the great public and the religious majority, the liberal minority of the clergy are compelled to speak with much reserve, to use great address in dealing with their adversaries, to touch only with light hand the vital questions, to attack squarely only the very smallest parts of the antiquated dogma to which all our churches, even those of the dissenters, still give in their adhesion. . . . Dean Stanley . . . better than any one else, has the instinct of the policy necessary to be pursued, a policy very guarded as to the foundation of the doctrines, very firm as to everything else, and well resolved not to be frightened.”

Stanley gone, relapse, reversion was to be feared. But the poet rallies, and hopes for the best. Associating his own father with Stanley, he says:

“ye both may now  
Wait for the leaven to work, the let to end.”

(“The let”!) Whenever the light shall reappear, then

“Our Arthur will again be present here,  
Again from lip to lip will pass his name,”

and so the poem not unworthily ends.

I make no further assays of poems as wholes, till I take up, for the final assay, the one poem which, by exception, I am able to account good—not perfect, but in the main good. Meantime, however, let me assemble here a few bits of Arnold’s verse—stanza, line, or phrase, as the case may be—that I can conscientiously



indulge myself in admiring. In "Obermann Once More" occurs this powerful and terribly true presentment of Roman civilization now begun to be decadent:

"On that hard pagan world, disgust  
And secret loathing fell;  
Deep weariness and sated lust  
Made human life a hell."

The infelicity of having things so inward and subjective as "disgust" and "secret loathing" "*fall*" on their subject—also the infelicity of the unnecessary, and therefore not helpful, qualifying word, "secret"—are almost completely overborne by the terrific power of the arraignment as a whole.

A certain elusive, evanishing charm allures me to another, a very different, stanza of the same poem: As was the case with the previously quoted stanza, Obermann is supposed to speak, but he undoubtedly speaks in both stanzas for Arnold, and now it is of Jesus Christ that he speaks:

"Now He is dead. Far hence He lies  
In the lorn Syrian town;  
And on His grave, with shining eyes,  
The Syrian stars look down."

These lines are by no means beyond criticism, but there is a haunting quality in them that commends them even to one who, like the present writer, does not in the least share the plaintive unbelief of them.

In his poem "The Grand Chartreuse," Arnold speaks of himself, with lugubrious effect, as

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead,  
The other powerless to be born"—

lines which are sometimes quoted as happily descri-

bing the experience of a man who feels himself to be having his lot in a time of transition, the "old order" yielding, but not yet replaced with the new. The note of complaint in them is out of keeping with the temperament of the author, who was a pronouncedly blithe spirit, buoyed to blitheness by a not unamiable self-complacency noted in him by his friends. The sadness of Arnold's poetry need not affect the reader with any painful sympathy for the author. The melancholy of the poetry was not, I believe, very deeply in the poet.

### VIII

THE poem that I take pleasure in being able to name for praise, considered as a whole, is the "Rugby Chapel." This is a thoroughly genuine loyal tribute of a son to a father. The feeling in it does equal honor to both subject and author. It is a piece without rhyme; irregular in meter and accent; therefore, of course, not blank verse. I do not highly approve this form of verse for a poem, and one would hardly have said beforehand that Arnold's genius and art were such that he would be likely to succeed in it. But the noble sincerity of the chastened personal feeling that throbs through the poem, and the true, elevated sympathy with the elevated character of the subject, carry everything before them, and the reader is reconciled to let the poet have this time his way with the form of his verse.

A date is prefixed, "November, 1857." The month in this date seems to give the key to the opening lines,

which begin, with purposed abrupt, unmetrical baldness,

"Coldly, sadly, descends  
The autumn evening."

That, till one has suffered one's mood to be modulated to perfect sympathy with the poet, will seem anything but promising. But after the sympathy has been established, it will seem magical for felicity of adaptedness to produce the effect that was desired. A few lines more, and the poet is ready to say,

"cold,  
Solemn, unlighted, austere,  
Through the gathering darkness, arise  
The chapel-walls, in whose bound  
Thou, my father! art laid."

Following those lines, there comes in the most serious artistic blemish of the poem:

"There thou dost lie in the gloom  
Of the autumn evening. But ah!  
That word *gloom* to my mind  
Brings thee back in the light  
Of thy radiant vigor again."

"That word *gloom* to my mind," is an unfortunate prosaic expedient of transition. But the transition once made, the poem goes on triumphantly in adequate appreciation of the fine character of the great master of Rugby. The sustained passage in which, under the figure of arduous and dangerous Alpine ascent, the poet describes the magnificent soul-saving life led by his father, is very noble. When the poet makes another transition, and, from praising his father goes on to praise his father's peers in the past he commits, by the way, the mistake of needlessly decrying his own

generation—as if, in his own generation, there were not those as worthy of praise as any in generations foregone. It would have been more generous, and more sane, if he had expressed his belief that, whether recognized or not, there were contemporaries of his own as devoted to soul-saving as was his father. But when the transition of unnecessary disparagement is done and dismissed, the poem rises again to its true level and it ends nobly. On the whole, “*Rugby Chapel*” is for me easily the masterpiece among all the poems, longer or shorter, of Arnold’s production. It is the one poem of them all that I like to read again and again, that yields me fresh pleasure with every fresh perusal.

I may say in conclusion of this paper and in dismissal of the subject of Matthew Arnold as poet and as critic, that I have sincerely tried to present him in his true character, neither praising him nor blaming in either one of his two qualities otherwise than according to what seemed to me his real desert. If I have taken away from any readers of mine a prized privilege of unreservedly enjoying a favorite author, I beg to remind such readers of a principle, which I believe to be an axiom valid in every intellectual realm, and certainly not least valid in the realm of literature, and which I have elsewhere stated in these words:

“To admire is delightful. To admire wisely is well. But to admire unwisely is not well, however delightful.”\*

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TENNYSON AS ARTIST IN  
LYRIC VERSE



## TENNYSON AS ARTIST IN LYRIC VERSE

### I

I SEEM to remember having seen somewhere a remark quoted as from that ingenious Frenchman Renan to the effect that no one is qualified to judge a religion until, having once believed it, he has come to believe it no longer. (In passing I may observe that in the case of a true religion, were there such—*the* true religion therefore—it would be a curious necessary qualification for judging it properly, not to be a believer in it!) I may modify this saying supposed of Renan's, and make it applicable in the realm of literature. It is true, I think, that to have once believed almost idolatrously in Tennyson as poet and to believe thus in him no longer, is a capital, if not quite an indispensable, precedent condition for judging him properly. This condition at least, if no others—others perhaps still more necessary!—exists in my case.

I was early in my adhesion to Tennyson; that is, I was sworn of his most devoted admirers when I was a youth in my teens. I made his acquaintance in the "In Memoriam," soon after that poem was published. So ardently did I admire and enjoy the "In Memoriam," so delightedly did I make it a study, that I soon had the greater part of it by heart. My memory was



then so indelibly impressed with it that even yet it would be a rare, exceptional case if anybody could, within my hearing or seeing, misquote a stanza or a line of it without my feeling the mistake and probably being able to correct it. From the "In Memoriam" I extended my knowledge of Tennyson to all his other poems up to that time published. I still own the two pasteboard-bound volumes (consolidated, however, into one volume long since, and suitably rebound) in which Ticknor, Reed & Fields of Boston reprinted Tennyson in 1851. Those volumes were my inseparable intellectual viaticum, wherever I might be, during the years of my much-traveled youth before I became a college student.

When I did become a college student, I was, I believe, the only member of the student body that knew Tennyson. I was a marked man on this account, considered—I had, or I imagined, reason to believe—something of a "crank" in that particular line. There were, however, two theological students who knew Tennyson, and who, because I knew him, overlooked my difference from them in academic rank, and admitted me, a freshman, to equal fellowship with themselves, graduates, in the noble, liberal love of high letters. *O noctes cenæque deûm!* The *symposia* we then held with delight, reciting to one another the snatches from Tennyson that happened at the moment most to rejoice our hearts! I would not dare be sure that we did not sometimes mingle mutual tears even of joy over the delectable things of our poet. Nothing else in poetry was equal to Tennyson. I well remember how once, having learned, to my surprise, that one of my fellow Tennysonians did not know Milton's

“Comus,” I congratulated him on his ignorance, and, asked why, I replied, “Because you have before you a great still-untasted literary joy.” But when we together took recourse to the “Comus,” he was disappointed, and so in measure was I. The “Comus” did not have the “modern touches” that our Tennysonian appetite required. Even Milton yielded to Tennyson. *Posthabitâ Samo!*

What man is there of us—us poetry-lovers, I mean—not old enough to have been a part of that world which thronged Albemarle Street to buy Byron on publishing mornings, and yet old enough to have watched Tennyson’s star nearly all the way up from the horizon to the meridian, but can recall the fury, divine and gentle—fury bred of the delicious wine of youth—with which he used to greet every fresh overflow of balm-dew that dropped upon him from the long pathway of that steep, starry culmination, so prosperous and so slow? “Locksley Hall!” “Morte d’Arthur!” “The Princess!” “In Memoriam!” “The Ode!” Yes, and “Maud” too! “Idylls of the King!” At what price would we not buy back the emotion with which we struck hands together and looked at one another out of eyes dim with enthusiastic tears, in the times foregone, over those gifts from our poet! Does Tennyson still furnish refectations of the gods to an ingenuous generation? Or have our youth found out another poet, whom we shall never know, more than our elders knew Tennyson, but whose is the future, and whose the fair young planet, and whose that old world which is the new?

Such was my early adhesion to Tennyson. I still adhere to him as strongly as ever—if less passionately,

more wisely, I believe. I can criticize him now, and the purpose of the present paper is to criticize him, at certain points that have, as it seems to me, failed hitherto to attract due attention. It is the literary fashion to praise Tennyson's poetic art, as if that art were nearly perfect. In fact, it is, I hold, by no means perfect. Wherein not perfect, especially wherein imperfection in it seems not to be generally recognized, it is the loyal aim of this criticism to show. If any praise of the great poet's work appears here and there, its introduction will be incidental and by the way. I would, however, have it clearly understood throughout that the transcendent merit and value of Tennyson's poetry are so much a matter of seated and unalterable conviction with me that to insist upon them I should feel to be gratuitous and almost impertinent.

## II

THE two points in which Tennyson's poetic art oftenest and most seriously fails, concern, first, his rhyming, and, secondly, his indulgence of violences and awkwardnesses in diction and in construction. I am aware that I thus name as points of failure on Tennyson's part the very two points at which inconsiderate critics not unfrequently suppose that they find his triumphant successes in poetic art. Frederic Harrison, for instance, in his truly generous appreciation of Tennyson—a poet whose ardent theism might be imagined to make him the natural object of antipathetic treatment at the hands of an inveterate positivist like his critic—says, in his volume of "Literary

Estimates" published a few years ago: "There is not a poor rhyme, not a forced phrase, not a loose or harsh line, in the whole series [that is, the whole series of pieces that bear the collective title "In Memoriam"]." An astonishing judgment for a practised writer like Frederic Harrison to pronounce!

It would not be reasonable to adduce as an instance of "poor rhyme" the rhyme of "love" with "prove," occurring in the first stanza of the proem to the "In Memoriam"; the poverty of the English language in rhymes for certain words that the poet needs must use necessitates occasional imperfections like that. It would be hypercritical to call the rhyme occurring in the second stanza of the proem, "brute" with "foot," a poor rhyme, although obviously "brute" would rhyme better with the last syllable in "confute." The last stanza of what we may call the first "canto" presents two imperfect rhymes, that of "scorn" with "over-worn" and that of "boast" with "lost." The last syllable in "hardihood," in the second canto, is not a perfect rhyme with "blood." Similarly, in the third canto, "good" and "blood" do not perfectly rhyme. In the fourth canto, second stanza, "now" and "low," rhyming perfectly to the eye, rhyme ill to the ear. The sixth canto has "home" and "come," "curse" and "horse," "lord" and "ford," for imperfect rhymes. The eighth canto repeats the rhyme of "come" with "home," and commits the technical sin of an identical rhyme, that of "light" with "delight." The ninth canto imperfectly rhymes "mourn" with "urn." The fourteenth canto begins with a stanza open to criticism in point alike of rhyme, of grammar, and of poetry:



"If one should bring me this report,  
That thou hadst touch'd the land to-day,  
And I went down unto the quay,  
And found thee lying in the port."

One passes along, through canto after canto, soon from this point beginning to be exquisite poetry, and feels rebuked to be gleaning faults on the way instead of admiring beauties; but let us try to admire in just measure and wisely. The twentieth canto rhymes "vows" with "house," "is" with "this," "none" with "gone." The twenty-third canto rhymes "shut" with "foot." Examination of the remaining cantos would, I should say, yield similar and proportionate results. It is sufficiently clear that Tennyson's poetic art is not a perfect art, in the sense of being an art that absolutely excludes imperfect rhymes, that absolutely excludes an occasional even bad rhyme.

I am not finical enough to think that any considerable deduction from the artistic merit of Tennyson's verse in the "In Memoriam" is to be made on the score of such shortcomings as have now been pointed out. Indeed, it may much rather be claimed that gleaning such as has here been conducted, to result so comparatively meager, proves high art, instead of the contrary, in this great poet. And, in enhancement of this well-deserved praise, it needs in justice to be remembered that the "In Memoriam" attempted great things in a difficult form of expression. If Tennyson nowhere exhibits a mastery of meter and rhythm like Swinburne's, who works in verse with words as if, for him, they willingly parted with every least particle of resistance to his conjuring spell, it may also be said, and it ought also to be said, that Tennyson nowhere

condescends, like Swinburne, to practise mere metric and rhythmic wizardry with words, letting them express what sense they will, or sometimes even no apprehensible sense at all. To make verse serve a high intellectual and moral purpose, and still be as approximately free from artistic fault in rhyme, as is Tennyson's "In Memoriam," is a great achievement. Still, while this is true, and while it ought to be generously recognized as true—still, I say, we ought to praise in measure and not beyond truth. Let us say that Tennyson's rhyming is good, is very good, is almost, not quite, beyond any comparison good, and not say that it is invariably good, not say that the "In Memoriam" has not a "poor rhyme" in the whole cycle of its cantos.

What has been shown to be the case with the "In Memoriam," as to perfection of rhyming, would not, however, I am bound to admit, hold equally true with his rhymed verse in general.

Only a few of the faults in rhyming that have thus been pointed out are to be regarded as serious. The total injurious effect of them all, taken together, is slight, not quite negligible, but slight. Faults they are, though slight, and they defeat perfection in poetic art. Fine as the art is despite its faults, it would be still finer if the faults were not present. The ideal thing for the poetic artist is to overcome *all* the difficulties encountered in the course of his versifying, and so to produce a faultless result. A poor rhyme, a pause wrongly placed, a word wrested from its rightful meaning, a phrase violently wrought, an inversion of order resorted to for the sake of meter or rhyme, anything whatever said that the poet would not

have wished to say could he have turned his verse without saying it, an emphasis required by the sense, but interfering with the rhythm, conversely, an emphasis required by position, but forbidden by sense, *e.g.*, a non-emphatic word in the place of rhyme, a contraction, an elision, a *crasis* not contributory to resultant melody, a recourse to the expedient of sounding a syllable that ought not to be sounded, a use of the periphrastic conjugation to eke out a measure, an archaism in diction admitted for purely technical reasons, a succession of letters or syllables difficult to pronounce in succession, a cacophonous word not needful for the purposed effect—any one of these things, and the list of course might be extended, goes some way toward disturbing the perfect satisfaction of the reader who is sensitive enough to feel the presence of such infelicities in the poetry he is reading. It is always a question of judgment with the poet to decide, in each case arising, at what point he will, upon the whole, for the sake of best total and final effect, capitulate to a difficulty instead of overcoming it. A great thing it is to be a good artist in verse. Wherever else also it is true that "art is long," it certainly is true in poetry. Tennyson knew this, and knew it better than almost any other poet. Poetic art may accordingly be studied in Tennyson's verse with greater advantage than perhaps in the verse of any other English poet whatever. We may learn alike from his successes and from his failures. I do not say that he was by native gift the greatest of all English artists in verse, but I am inclined to hold that, among them all, he was the most conscious, most intentional, most patiently laborious, as also—and this is a great thing—he had the

longest, the most uninterrupted, the most exclusive, practise at his art.

In the incidental specifications foregoing, it will be observed that we dealt, not exhaustively, but suggestively, with negative points in the art of verse, with things, that is to say, which are to be avoided. But of course there are things which are to be sought. Canorous words, words rich in vowels, words made up of letters and syllables that are easily pronounced and that are agreeable to the ear, variety of vowel-sounds, vowel-sounds in keeping with the sense and with the feeling to be conveyed in the verse, happy phrasing, happy placing of pauses, worthy words for rhymes, happy mingling of end-stopped lines with lines run-on, assonances where fit, alliterations, not too many, not too marked, buried often and producing their effect without being recognized—these and a score of things besides are the positive points in the art of verse which are to be achieved by the poet, for the most part without his seeking to achieve them, and without his knowing that he has achieved them—his art having attained to concealment of itself, not only from the reader, but from the writer.

Again, it will be noted that, in all our specifications, we dwelt only on the mere mechanics of verse. When it is considered that, after mastering all his technical difficulties, and after securing satisfactory positive results of melody or of harmony, and of felicity in phrase, the artist in verse, however accomplished as such, is not a true poet unless he makes his verse the medium or vehicle of fine thought, fine sentiment, fine passion, fine fancy, all obedient to a presiding imagination harmonizing all—then it will be seen how high



an achievement *good* poetry is, what a gift from God, energizing achievement by man, *great* poetry is. If I say, as I do say, that Tennyson, to a truly wonderful degree, meets all these high and hard requirements of his art, it will of course be saying that his poetry is generally, judged by the most exacting standards, good, while sometimes it is great, poetry. Still it is no disloyalty to criticize it.

### III

I HAVE mentioned two points in particular at which Tennyson's poetic art is indisputably open to criticism. Imperfect rhyming has been sufficiently dwelt upon. Now what about the more serious matter of forced unnatural use, both of words and of phrases in Tennyson's poetry? Bluntly, it is to be said that in this respect Tennyson is not seldom a serious offender. At the same time, it is to be said that he offends here with such consummate artistic adroitness that his offenses, most of them, escape any but very alert and vigilant and very sensitive notice. Success such as his with violations of propriety in language, deserves almost to be set down to the credit of the artist, instead of being reckoned against him. "Almost"—but, in truth, and strictness, not quite!

I have no thought of criticizing any poem of Tennyson's throughout, much less any thought of criticizing the whole body of his verse, to illustrate the present count in my friendly indictment of his art. I shall adduce illustrative instances at random as they occur to my memory.

In the indulgence of a long-established habit of mine as to poetry in general, I have lately been dwelling, at intervals of leisure in thought, on a certain stanza of the "In Memoriam," with luxurious, with almost Sybaritic, enjoyment of it. The atmosphere which invests that stanza—well, perhaps it is partly an atmosphere subjectively created by myself, and only attributed to the stanza—seems to me so exquisitely bland, in what I may paradoxically call the blithe pathos of it—its "pathos of past gladness," to quote a phrase from verse of my own—that I perforce feel the poetry of it, and hence the rhythm of it too, in a half-disqualifying mood of sympathy with the poet, possibly so giving the lines a poetic value not wholly their own. I need not ask the reader to admire and enjoy the stanza as I do, in order to point out the characteristic Tennysonian violence done to language in the poet's making "many an old philosophy" *sing*. It is violence done to *language*; it is not falseness of conception. Tennyson no more conceived philosophy as singing than Milton did, when he pronounced philosophy to be "musical as is Apollo's lute." And, by the way, it was perhaps a half-unrecognized influence from that place in the "Comus" that suggested to Tennyson the first two lines of his stanza:

"And many an old philosophy  
On Argive heights divinely sang,  
And round us every thicket rang  
To many a flute of Arcady."

"How charming is divine philosophy,  
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,  
But musical as is Apollo's lute,"

are Milton's lines. The two adjectives "divine" and "musical," as well as the substantive "philosophy," relate Milton's to Tennyson's lines, in which we have "philosophy" "divinely" "singing." The pedigree of phrase or rhythm in poetry is sometimes long, and it is often interesting to trace. Shakespeare makes "Love as sweet and musical As is Apollo's lute, strung with his hair"—which doubtless furnished to Milton what he heightened and chastened into his verses. And possibly Tennyson's lines, thus doubly derived, gave in turn Matthew Arnold his line, "The nightingales divinely sing."

Now after having expressed so strongly my pleasure in the stanza quoted from Tennyson, for its incomparably bland atmosphere, and its mellow music, shall I seem inconsistent and capricious if I say that in it the characteristic Tennysonian forcing of word and phrase to convey the meaning intended reaches almost its "last and sharpest height"? This, of course, could not be solely for the reason that "philosophy" is made to "sing." It is the whole phrasing of the stanza that is violent—charmingly violent, but violent. Consider what Tennyson had to express in that stanza. He wished to tell us how he and his friend Hallam had halcyon days together in the high fellowship of Greek letters. Think of Plato for the divine philosophy in which the twain communed, of Theocritus for the pastoral poetry (conventionally having its scenes laid in Arcadia) with which they regaled themselves in diversion from higher themes, and then you have Tennyson boldly locating both Attica and Arcadia in England, or rather transforming English hills and English glens into "Argive heights" and dells of "Arcady."

What could be more violent, and what could be finer, more effective? (In later editions of the *In Memoriam* "every thicket" becomes "all the thicket"—a change which seems to me not an improvement.)

Let us now take a step or two in regress, and consider some of the preceding stanzas in the same canto. The poet engages in delightful, though pensive, reminiscence of the past conceived as a "pathway" on which he and his friend fared forward together, but which now stretches on for him into the future without the companionship that had made his former experience of life so joyous. That pathway—"how changed," he exclaims, —

"from where it ran  
Through lands where not a leaf was dumb;  
But all the lavish hills would hum  
The murmur of a happy Pan."

To make the adjective "lavish" serve his purpose in describing the "hills" of that delightful imaginative landscape is, of course, an idiosyncratic force put upon the word by the poet; so also to have those hills "hum" a "murmur" is a turn of expression forced a little for the sake of the rhyme. "The murmur of a happy Pan" is a most mellifluous line, and it concentrates into its few words all the feeling that could be imagined to be inspired by life and youth in perfect rhyme with nature. But what a lovely violence is applied to the name "Pan," to make it serve the poet's wish! "A happy Pan"—how grateful to the ear that phrase, how magical to the cultivated sense of subtle charm from classic association! But it is more and other than a mere individual turn of expression—it is a distinct forcing of words out of a natural use to make



them carry a sense not properly belonging to them. It is, however, a violence converted by the art of the poet into a felicity—a felicity well deserving of course to be qualified as “curious” in the true Latin meaning of that word, “carefully studied.” It was the necessity of rhyming that compelled the artist here, but it was the true poet that came to the artist’s relief. When, in later lines, Tennyson says,

“And all the secret of the spring  
Moved in the chambers of the blood,”

he keeps himself to meter by practising a violence in the use of the word “chambers”—a violence which is admissible perhaps, but which certainly is not admirable. Observe, notwithstanding, how the orderly, smooth movement of the line has the effect to gloss the violence and render it hardly noticeable.

Very different from the instances that have been adduced of violence to expression turned into inimitable curious felicity by the art of the poet, is the following from an earlier canto:

“O to us,  
The fools of habit, sweeter seems  
“To rest beneath the clover sod,  
That takes the sunshine and the rains,  
*Or where the kneeling hamlet drains*  
*The chalice of the grapes of God,”* etc.

The violence here is so great that it becomes obscurity, or, which is sometimes the same thing, ambiguity. I have known the two lines which I italicize to be interpreted as meaning a reference to the local situation of the “hamlet,” the hamlet taking, as it were, a kneeling posture at the foot of a hill—which, of course,

leaves the last line of the stanza hanging quite in the air. Those two lines assuredly express in a very violent way the idea of burial under the floor of the chancel of a church, at the separating rail of which, or altar, the communicants from the hamlet kneel to receive the sacred wine of communion. "Grapes" is violent for "wine," and "grapes of God" is violent for 'wine dedicated to sacred use,' and the violence is accentuated by "chalice" of those "grapes." A cup of grapes! "Drains" is an extremely unhappy violence of expression to import the reverent partaking of the communion wine—naturally starting, as it does, a thought of greedy overindulgence on the part of communicants. And then to "drain" a cup of grapes!

The first canto of the "In Memoriam"—"section," I observe, instead of "canto" the poet himself, or, if not the poet, the poet's son, calls the divisions of the poem; but I take the liberty of naming them as to me seems not unfit—the first canto presents a number of noticeable violences in expression, no one of them to my feeling admirable. Take the concluding word of the canto, "overworn." What does that word in this place mean? Naturally, and likewise according to the lexicographers, it should mean "exhausted in condition," as, for instance, through toil or through trial. But what kind of sense does that yield for the sentence in which the word occurs? Does the poet mean to say, can he mean to say, merely that as a result of certain experiences of his, the man in question, or rather all that said man "was," is, in the "boast" of the "victor Hours," reduced to a state of complete exhaustion? If so, why should the poet take pains to say, "But all he was," instead of saying simply "he," is "over-

worn"? But, at any rate, the sense, according to this understanding of it, is unsupposably disappointing and empty. I have somewhere—whether in my reading or in conversation I can not now recall—met with the suggestion that what the poet meant to make the "boast" of "the victor Hours" was that the man, exercised through experience of love and loss, had after all remained unimproved in character, was the same as he had been before, that his old self was carried forward into his subsequent life, that, in short, he had not made a "stepping-stone" of his "dead self," and risen thereon to "higher things." The only consideration to make this interpretation improbable is the extraordinary violence which it implies as practised on the word "overworn" to compel it to express that meaning. But there was the word "scorn," which had to have a rhyme, and Tennyson was equal, upon occasion, to almost any violence of expression. There is no note on this line in the edition of the "In Memoriam" purporting to be annotated by the poet.

The penultimate stanza of this canto is full of the Tennysonian violence in expression. In the line, "Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drown'd," the word "drown'd," used absolutely thus—that is, apart from any suggestion of an element in which a drowning might take place—is violent, not very objectionably so, but violent, to express the sense of being brought to an end. But the next line exceeds in violence: "Let darkness keep her raven gloss." The rhyming word "loss," imminent, and foreseen by the poet to be inevitable, must be responsible for the rhyming word "gloss," so undesirable here and so violent. Indeed, that word is more than violent. It actually quarrels

with the meaning to be expressed. It has its sole semblance of justification in the adjective supplied by the poet to overcome its contrary effect—"raven gloss." Now the plumage of a raven is both black and glossy (very moderately glossy); but, so far as it is a fit figure for "darkness," it is the blackness of it, and not the gloss of it, that serves. Unhappy therefore it was for the poet here to be obliged to use the word "gloss," doubly unhappy that he should need to emphasize it by putting it in the rhyming place. Milton's "the raven down of darkness" is fanciful indeed, but better harmonized with the idea of "darkness" than Tennyson's "raven gloss." The whole line in which "gloss" occurs is a violence. So is its rhyming fellow, "Ah, sweeter to be drunk with loss." Just what that line means is not clear. Does it mean that it is "sweeter" for a man to be visited with a loss which completely overwhelms him—reduces him permanently to a state comparable to that of a drunken man—than for him to go through experiences of love and loss, coming out thence "overworn"—whichever "overworn" means, whether 'hopelessly exhausted' or 'left unchanged from what he was before'? The superior "sweetness" of being thus "drunk with loss" is not immediately apparent to the ordinary mind. Altogether, what with "to dance with death, to beat the ground," in addition to the forced expressions previously pointed out, we have in this first canto of the "In Memoriam" a complicated example of Tennyson's less successful, less admirable, violence of expression, applied in a case in which there was nothing very well worthy to be expressed at all.



## IV

TENNYSON is an unusually genuine poet—genuine, I mean, in the sense of having something real, in thought, in feeling, in fact, in fancy, behind his words and phrases to give them solid worth. But if his genuineness had been still greater, more constant, more controlling, he would have avoided many of the faults, especially the faults of violence in expression, with which, as the case with him now stands, he is justly chargeable. His love for Hallam was unquestionably sincere and profound, his sorrow therefore for Hallam's loss was deep and lasting. Still his expressions sometimes exceeded, and then he was betrayed. For example, and not to seek the strongest example, when he sang,

“Still onward winds the dreary way,  
I with it, for I long to prove  
No lapse of moons can canker love,  
Whatever fickle tongues may say,”

he went beyond the truth of his real thought and real feeling. He did not really persist in living—that is, refrain from suicide—for the sake of “proving” that his love was lasting; but in saying “I with it,” and giving what he gives as his reason for doing so, he virtually affirms that manifest extravagance. We must not compel a poet to be a good logician, but evidently the poet in this case could not “prove” his proposition by simply “winding” “with the dreary way.” “Lapse of moons” is not a good phrase, for the reason that we can not well conceive of “moons” as “lapsing”—but it is a good phrase to the ear, and it carries its sense to the mind.

Let us now cease gleaning in the “In Memoriam”

for examples of Tennyson's defective poetic art; the poem is too noble to be subjected further to such use. We need, perhaps, to remind ourselves that we are not engaged in a criticism of the "In Memoriam." If we were, it would be necessary to point out that the poem is not properly a poem, but a series of poems having, indeed, such a unity as is created by their common relation to one theme, but not otherwise unified, not cumulative, not constituted into an organic whole. Something similar would have to be said of the "Idylls of the King," which to my mind quite refuse to become unified into an epic, as the poet's afterthought led him to attempt to unify them; and "The Princess," Tennyson, with a not unjust feeling as to its true character, called "A Medley" when he published it, although later he seems to have regretted having unnecessarily so disparaged his work. The "Maud" is somewhat like, in the respect now had in mind. In truth, Tennyson, either not finding a fit subject to inspire him, or shrinking from the arduousness of great epic attempt, consented never to build on the largest architectonic lines in poetry. Perhaps he could have done this with success had he made the attempt, but since he did not do it, we can not match him with Milton as an artist in verse.

Let us wander now at random, elsewhere than in the "In Memoriam," to find a few more examples of the characteristic Tennysonian bent toward violence in expression.

"You ask me why though ill at ease  
Within this region I *subsist*."

I need only italicize the word "subsist" to have its awkward violence recognized; "*within* this region" is

also a phrase somewhat forced. But the fine short piece thus inauspiciously started contains many compensatingly felicitous turns of expression. And it is, of course, a thing to be recognized and to be constantly remembered while we are estimating the value of verse, that no small part of the charm of poetry lies in the saying of things in unexpected and unfamiliar ways. Matter quite common, matter even altogether trite, may be redeemed to freshness and to beauty by a fresh and beautiful form of expression. It is always a nice question of taste and judgment for the poet to decide whether or not he will consent to admit commonplace matter on any terms whatever into his production. If he decides in favor of admitting such matter, it is incumbent on him to provide a charm of phrase or of rhythm, preferably of both phrase and rhythm, to justify and commend the admission. If he can not do this, he must refuse the admission, on pain of otherwise degrading the tone of his poetry. When Longfellow closed his poem on the death of the Duke of Wellington with the lines, "Nothing in Nature's aspect intimated That a great man was dead," he failed to provide the needful distinction of phrase; indeed, the expression, instead of heightening, lowers the dignity of the commonplace thought. On the other hand, when Tennyson expressed the commonplace thought of the universal and perpetual prevalence of human sorrow, in the simple words, "Never morning wore To evening but some heart did break," he made his expression fresh enough and, in its metrical place, pleasing enough, not to depress the level of the verse in which it occurs—a level, to be sure, not very high. "Wore," used as it is here, is an idiosyncrasy of the

poet, which, if it is slightly violent, has a certain charm to commend it—a charm blended of novelty and euphony, gratifying as it does the expectant ear with an unexpected and canorous rhyme. The “did break,” instead of “broke,” both meter and rhyme required, and we are all of us constituted so, in complaisant natural tendency to adjust ourselves to poetry which in general we admire, that we easily come to feel, or fancy, a certain fitness in “did break” that would have been lost if “broke” had been used.

Tennyson was by no means invariably as happy as in this instance he was, in redeeming his commonplace to beauty by beautiful expression. I shall reluctantly adduce examples to illustrate this remark, but meantime a few more instances gathered from here and there in his verse to indicate how pervasive was the tendency he indulged to practise violence of expression.

“Roll’d in one another’s arms,” Tennyson says and sings in “Locksley Hall.” Try the realizing of that in your imagination and you will at once feel how ill-conceived, or if not ill-conceived, how ill-expressed, it is. It can not be supposed that the poet actually conceived it as he expressed it. He did not mean, he could not have meant, to represent the lover-pair as “roll’d,” whether separately or locked together. The only admissible supposition is that he meant what “folded in each other’s arms” would have expressed, and expressed in stricter propriety of language. “What is that which I should turn to?” in the same poem, is an awkward periphrasis for “What should I turn to?”—which simple form of phrase fully expresses the poet’s true meaning. “What is that which I should turn to?” seems to imply that the thing to be turned to was



known already by the person asking the deliberative question, and that this person was only doubtful now in his mind just what might be the character of that known thing. In the very next couplet of the poem, the same awkward, meter-filling device of expression recurs in "What is that which I should do?" "Pilots of the purple twilight" is a well-sounding phrase, with a fine prick in it to the imagination—the imagination, however, is somewhat baffled, after all—in the words "purple twilight"; but why "pilots"—unless for the sake of the alliteration? The rush of movement and the richness of diction, at once picturesque and canorous, unite to carry all off triumphantly, and the violence here must be accounted one of the poet's artistic felicities—violence, however, it is, and it may properly be recognized as such. Let us not cease to admire, but let us try to admire wisely.

In the "Dream of Fair Women," Iphigenia, met by the dreaming poet in the underworld, speaks. Recalling the occasion of her dying as a sacrifice, she remembers how to her eyes, blinded with tears, the objects that met them appeared indistinct and unsteady:

"The high masts flickered as they lay afloat,  
The crowds, the temples, wavered, and the shore;  
The bright death quivered at the victim's throat;  
Touch'd; and I knew no more."

So the stanza reads in the final edition of Tennyson's poetry, changed from the form in which it originally appeared, which is as follows:

"The tall masts quivered as they lay afloat,  
The temples and the people and the shore;  
One drew a sharp knife through my tender throat  
Slowly—and nothing more."

In both forms of the stanza, the masts *lie* "afloat"—which, of course, is a deliberate violence of expression, approved by the poet's art when that art had reached its last maturity. I do not need in this case to pronounce myself either for or against the violence; my purpose is served when I simply point it out as one more illustration of Tennyson's practise in verse. Since the stanza is, in its two forms, incidentally before us, we may yield to the temptation to consider a little the changes made by the poet. Are the changes improvements? The most important change is that in the last two lines. I fear that his change was yielded by the poet—I hope reluctantly—under the influence of a pert critical suggestion from one of the reviews, of the time when the poem was first published, to the effect that "and nothing more" prompts the reader to ask, "What more could she expect?" For my own part, I am sorry the poet yielded to the critic. He could have afforded to let such a critic indulge his smartness, in order to retain, for the benefit of those who would appreciate it, the greater impressiveness of the fine ellipsis too hastily surrendered to the challenge. I am glad that no such surrender was made to that other foolish critic—or was it the same?—who, on the place of "The Princess" where the Prince is made to say, "I babbled for you, as babies for the moon, Vague brightness," objected that the moon was by no means a "vague brightness," but, on the contrary, a well-defined, luminous disk! Such qualifications on the part of some readers for the understanding and appreciation of his work, the poet has to reckon with! As for the other changes in the stanza—most of them rendered necessary by the poet's decision to avoid

saying, "and nothing more"—they are all, I think, to be regretted. "Flickered" in the first line is not so good as "quivered." "The high masts" is not so good as "The tall masts," "The crowds, the temples, wavered, and the shore" is not so good as "The temples and the people and the shore," with its striking ellipsis of new verb—no new verb was needed, and, in fact, the new verb supplied unhappily seems to suggest a difference between the motion of the "masts" and that of the other objects named, as if, while those "flickered," these "wavered." "The bright death," in metonymy for "knife" is too artificial to be happily attributed to the maid, and the third-person substantive, "victim," is also unnatural for her use.

When we reach the conclusion of this truly magnificent poem (and wonderful as magnificent—the production of a youth of twenty-one or twenty-two years!), we meet with two stanzas which constitute a stumbling-block alike to the intelligence and to the imagination. I will be frank to acknowledge that I have never been able to construe those two stanzas so as to get either satisfactory sense or defensible syntax out of them. "As when," the penultimate stanza begins, but there neither precedes nor follows any correlate to explain such a beginning. Nothing happens "as when." The two stanzas together constitute what the grammarians would call a protasis, which is left hanging in the air with no apodosis, either before or after, to balance and support it. It seems a singular inadvertence on the poet's part. "Because all words," the last stanza begins; it proceeds by giving what purports to be a reason why certain "yearnings" "can not be expressed." The reason assigned is that "all words, though cull'd

with choicest art, Failing to give the bitter of the sweet,  
 Wither beneath the palate, and the heart Faints, faded  
 by its heat"—a sentence which I have never under-  
 stood, but which, whatever may be its sense not divined  
 by me, is, I am quite sure, exceedingly forced in form  
 of expression.

## V

It is well-nigh incomprehensible that in the same vol-  
 ume, first published in 1832, with such incomparable  
 poetic and artistic productions as "The Palace of Art,"  
 "A Dream of Fair Women," "The Lotus-Eaters,"  
 "Ænone," should have appeared the verses inscribed  
 "To J. S."—well-nigh incomprehensible, I mean, that  
 the same poet and artist, at the same stage of his in-  
 tellectual development, should be the author of them  
 all alike. For those verses, although they contain cer-  
 tain lines having distinction enough to render them  
 striking, and to make them seem worthy to become  
 memorable and familiar—those verses, taken together  
 as constituting a whole, are nothing short of amazing  
 for their worthlessness. They are, indeed, in consider-  
 able part even worse than worthless, for they are at  
 points false in thought, and ungentle in feeling.

"The wind, that beats the mountain, blows  
 More softly round the open wold"—

are the opening lines, which affirm what is not a fact  
 —besides that blowing "round the open wold" does not  
 well describe the behavior of a wind that has direction  
 steady enough to "beat the mountain."



"And gently comes the world to those  
That are cast in gentle mold"—

are the lines that complete the first stanza. They make a statement which, to say the least, is doubtful; but, at any rate, what a forced, unnatural expression is, "comes the world"! And then what meter, what rhythm, in the last line!

How could our Tennyson go on as he does in the next stanza? "And me this knowledge bolder made"—to wit, the "knowledge" of two things neither of them certainly true—"Or else I had not dared to flow In these words toward you"—who but Tennyson could speak of himself as "flowing," whether in words or otherwise, "toward" a person? And the sense expressed! If, forsooth, the poet had not known that the world comes gently to gentle souls, he would not have dared to write a letter of condolence in verse to his bereaved friend! It can not be denied that at least the sense and the expression are worthy of each other. The third stanza is in merit about level with the amateur obituary verse that one reads in rural newspapers:

"'Tis strange that those we lean on most,  
Those in whose laps our limbs are nursed,  
Fall into shadow soonest lost,  
Those we love first are taken first."

"Our *limbs* are nursed!" And "'Tis strange," to introduce what is *not* strange, but on the contrary obviously quite in the course of nature. Then follows a stanza which, by the way, would not read out of place in a poem of Browning's:

"God gives us love; something to love  
He lends us; but, when love is grown

To ripeness, that on which it throve  
Falls off, and love is left alone."

An almost Byronic touch begins the next stanza, which, however, proceeds to its finish in a strain of incredible commonplace, not to say doggerel:

"This is the curse of time! Alas!  
In grief I am not all unlearned;  
Once thro' mine own doors Death did pass;  
One went *who never hath return'd.*"

I could not refrain from italicizing words in which Tennyson thought it worth while to note the fact that, in the particular case referred to, the deceased did not "return"! The poet dwells, with ineffective, would-be-pathetic, detail, upon the irreversible, the everlasting, nature of the loss which he suffered in that death, and finally, with periphrasis, discloses that it was his father who died:

"He will not smile—not speak to me  
Once more. Two years his chair is seen  
Empty before us. That was he  
Without whose life I had not been."

All this that I am now doing seems very ungracious. It certainly is to me a most unwelcome, most uncongenial, task. I well-nigh uncontrollably recoil from it. But it is necessary. That is, if we are to deal faithfully with Tennyson's poetic art, penetrate to the secret of it, value it truly. It needs to be seen that Tennyson was such in taste, judgment, inspiration, or lack of inspiration, that he *could* do these things, while yet such that he could achieve those far-shining, those incomparable, triumphs in verse which stand indestructibly to the credit of his fame. It would not answer simply and briefly to say, for instance, of a

piece like this "To J. S.," that it is not up to the standard of Tennyson at his best, that it has faults of meter, of phrase, of thought, of feeling, that it tends to be commonplace. It is desirable to dwell on the work in detail, as the poet himself ought to have dwelt on it, and discover exactly what are those faults named and generalized about. I bespeak my readers' attention and patience while I continue the examination begun. There is not, I think, a single stanza in the poem that does not invite disapproving remark. I shall, however, not hold myself bound to remark upon every stanza.

Skipping, then, the stanza next following the one last remarked upon, we have this:

"I knew your brother; his mute dust  
I honor, and his living worth;  
A man more pure and bold and just  
Was never born into the earth."

"Mute dust"? "His living worth," as an antithesis and complement to "his mute dust"? Try putting the sense of this sentence into a simple, straightforward expression, and you will at once feel how subtly and completely wrong it is: 'I honor him now that he is dead, and I honor him too for what he was while living.' "Bold" is not an adjective suitable, without some qualification attached, to praise a man with. "Born into the earth," for "born into the world"? The next stanza reads:

"I have not looked upon you nigh  
Since that dear soul hath fallen asleep;  
Great Nature is more wise than I,  
I will not tell you not to weep."

"Great Nature is more wise than I" is a striking line;

it has commanded attention and quotation. Now let it be observed that there is absolutely no reason for the poet's saying what he says in the first line (and says with extreme awkwardness), except to provide a rhyming line for match to "Great Nature is more wise than I"; also, to provide that rhyming line is the poet's excuse for the clumsiness with which, abruptly, and irrelevantly, and quite gratuitously, he informs his friend that they two had not met since the death of the latter's brother. The disagreeable wrong tense in "hath fallen asleep" might have been avoided by the use of the simple, natural expression, "Since your dear brother fell asleep." "Great Nature is more wise than I" has its value, but it is hardly valuable enough to warrant all the complex awkwardness used to introduce it.

The stanza succeeding is very bad:

"And tho' mine own eyes fill with dew  
 Drawn from the spirit thro' the brain,  
 I will not even preach to you  
 'Weep, weeping dulls the inward pain.'"

We do not need to wonder whether the poet did not here express himself strongly to the point of extravagance and consequent unguineness; for the tears that he wept seem to have been very uncommon tears. It may be doubted if any one else ever wept just such tears. These tears filled the eyes to be sure, like common tears, but, very unlike common tears, they were "drawn from the spirit," and, on their way thence to the eyes, they passed "thro' the brain"! Of course the lachrymal hydraulics thus carefully given would not fit any effusion of tears other than this particular one. If I should be rebuked for my



levity by being told that the poet was here, in his individual way, simply giving the ordinary origin and course of any tears—his “spirit” being the seat of sensibility, and his “brain” the organ of thought acting upon the sensibility to cause weeping—then I should have to reply that to make, in any form, such a quasi-scientific statement as to the source and channel of “dew” filling the eyes was the reverse of poetic, and was fatal to that effect of sympathy on the poet’s part which should have been present to be felt by the reader.

This epistolary poem of condolence is remarkably lacking in coherence of one stanza with another. “His memory long will live alone, In all our hearts,” the poet says, in complete detachment from what preceded, and in the following stanza he exclaims:

“Vain solace! Memory standing near  
Cast down her eyes, and in her throat  
Her voice seem’d distant, and a tear  
Dropt on the letters as I wrote.”

Here the idea of “his memory” is abandoned, and the idea of Memory personified takes its place. Personified Memory, at this particular moment, “cast down her eyes,” and “her voice seem’d distant,” seeming so “in her throat”—which is all that is said of personified Memory; but, in apparent synchronism, “a tear dropt on the letters” as the poet “wrote.” Whether the tear was from the poet’s eyes or from the eyes of Memory does not appear. But the poet next confesses, “I wrote I know not what.” If this mental confusion relates to all that precedes in the poem, it might be taken as indicating at least an obscure consciousness on the poet’s part that he had not thus far produced a

very satisfactory result. "In truth," he goes on to say, "how *should* I soothe you anyway?" The italics are Tennyson's. "Yet something I did wish to say," he adds, in the next stanza giving his reason for the wish:

"For he too was a friend to me:  
Both are my friends, and my true heart  
Bleedeth for both."

That the poet, after having gone so far in expressing his sympathy, should now suddenly bethink himself to furnish a reason for his wishing to say "something," is certainly singular; but that he should give such a commonplace reason in such an awkward style of expression is more than singular; it is incomprehensible. Having declared that "he *too was* a friend," the poet improgressively adds, "Both *are* my friends." "Yet it may be," he says, with misgiving, "that only silence suiteth best," and the stanza following explains his misgiving:

"Words weaker than your grief would make  
Grief more. 'Twere better I should cease,  
Although myself could almost take  
The place of him that sleeps in peace."

If the first sentence here presents a purely fanciful idea, it may be set down to the account of poetic license; but the last two lines seem to show that the poet was resolved now at least to use words *not* weaker than his friend's grief. In short, this sudden burst of extravagant expression, taken in the interpretative light of all the rest of the poem, convicts the poet of unguineness in it. He assuredly did not have the degree of feeling that his words express.

There follows next, constituting the penultimate stanza of the poem, the sweetest, the most canorous,

bit of verse in the whole production. This, indeed, is really noble music to the ear. I have long been fond of feasting my ear on it. There is even an organ-tone to be heard in the rich vowel-sounds of it, prolonged as these are, and deepened, by the liquids following them (I venture to italicize the letters that give the fine heightening effect thus noted):

“Sleep sweetly, tender heart, in peace;  
Sleep, *holy spirit*, blessed *soul*,  
While the *stars burn*, the *moons increase*,  
And the great ages onward roll.”

For mere music in verse, nothing could be better. Even the soft sibilants in the first two lines are noteworthy agreeable. When you come to considering the sense conveyed in the stanza, you are at a stand. Does the poet mean to consign the “spirit” of his friend to unending unconscious repose? Has he, in effect, written a poetic version of the memorable historic inscription placed by Fouché on the gates to the cemeteries of Paris, “Death is an eternal sleep”? The stanza reads like it. “Burn” does not seem just the word for the light of “stars,” and, after mention of the stars, with their unchangingness, to mention the “moon,” with her changing phases emphasized by a word for her waxing only, as if there were no waning in alternation to be taken account of, is disappointing to the natural wish that at least anticlimax should be avoided. “And the great ages onward roll” has a truly grand effect—to the ear—and to the mind a satisfying effect, *provided* the poet’s meaning was to indicate a never-ending state of quiescence for the dead; if he did not mean this—well, it is a case of overexpression for anything less than an eternal sleep.

The final stanza has an expression that may throw a light backward and relieve the somberness of prospect that had been bespoken for the dead in terms so suave and quasi-consolatory. "Sleep till the *end*," the poet says, thus doubtfully foreshadowing an "end" to the immensely prolonged term of the soul's quiescence:

"Sleep till the end, true soul and sweet,  
Nothing comes to thee new or strange."

Thus far, certainly, it seems to be the spiritual part of the dead man's nature that has occupied the poet's thought in the two closing stanzas. But now comes a third line in which the body is thought of, and even addressed:

"Sleep full of rest *from head to feet*"—

which seems to indicate that the poet did not in his thought discriminate between the incorporeal and the corporeal elements of the dead man's nature; but the last line of all uses a style of address that limits the meaning very strictly to the corporeal elements: "Lie still, dry dust," it reads, and then adds a phrase which, taken in its connection, is hopelessly ambiguous, wavering between two directly opposite senses. The whole line is, "Lie still, dry dust, secure of change." Does "secure of change" mean secured against the possibility of any change to be suffered in the future? Or, quite to the contrary of this, does it mean *confident* of the change awaiting in ultimate resurrection? I offer no opinion; I simply propound the problem. The latter interpretation is more in accordance with the proper meaning of the word "secure"; but Tennyson's poetic art is quite capable of forcing the phrase



at his pleasure to express the other sense. It is to be said that the more Christian-like sense is in better agreement with Tennyson's consistently-held religious views, while, on the other hand, the tenor of the immediate context (unless we press the phrase "till the end") favors the alternative interpretation. I fear that the poet here was less careful than it was his wont to be about having a perfectly determinate meaning, and then expressing it unmistakably. He might easily have avoided the very unpoetical apostrophe, "dry dust," and besides have made his line express the Christian sense which perhaps he had in mind, by saying something like this, "Sleep full of rest from head to feet, Secure of final glorious change."

And in a volume reading on its title-page "Lyrical Poems by Alfred Lord Tennyson *Selected* and Annotated by Francis T. Palgrave," this piece, "To J. S.," is included, while in the dedicatory epistle addressed, "My dear Lady Tennyson," the editor of the "Golden Treasury" speaks of his present book as "a *selection* from the *best* work of the world's greatest living Poet." So little sometimes may the critical faculty be in exercise in the doing of ostensible critical work!

## VI

I HAVE been doing something a little beyond the proposal with which I commenced this paper, by attention bestowed on Tennyson's poetic art in points other than faulty rhyme and forced expression. The temptation was strong, and it did not seem necessary to resist it. We have discovered and displayed quali-

ties in Tennyson's poetic production not to have been looked for in work from the brain and hand of a poet like him. We—or shall I say “I,” and take the whole responsibility upon myself alone?—have perhaps almost run the risk of incurring the “curse” pronounced by Tennyson from Shakespeare (“my Shakespeare's curse,” he calls it) in those lines of his about the dead “poet”:

“He gave the people of his best:  
His worst he kept, his best he gave.  
My Shakespeare's curse on clown and knave  
Who will not let his ashes rest.”

We may, however, take heart of grace, for we have dealt only with what Tennyson himself actually “gave the people.” Thus far, at least, that has been the case; but now I am about to show verses from his pen that he did not so “give”; and yet they will be verses of which it can hardly be said that he “kept” them—for how, otherwise than by his consent, should they have become accessible to the ordinary reader? For the sake of the instruction that these verses may be made to yield, I, on the whole, decide to risk incurring the threatened “curse.” I say this by way of hint to myself; but of course I know that what Tennyson had in his mind, when pronouncing the curse, was scandalous personal gossip about the dead, and not critical attention to his work. Here, then, is a form (first draft perhaps) through which Tennyson's dedication “To the Queen” seems to have passed, on its way to be transfigured into the poem as finally published. (I rely, in printing, on what, in Mr. Richard Jones's book, “The Growth of the Idylls of the King,” is given as reproduction of the autograph manuscript now in

the keeping of the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia. I am careful in printing to follow scrupulously the typography given by Mr. Jones, which no doubt faithfully represents the poet's manuscript, capital letters, contractions, spelling, punctuation, and all.)

"The noblest men are born & bred  
 Among the Saxo Norman race  
 And in this world the noblest place,  
 Madam, is yours our Queen & Head.

"Your name is blown on every wind,  
 Your flag thro' Austral ice is borne  
 And glimmers to the Northern morn  
 And floats in either golden Ind.

"The Poets they that often seem  
 So wretched touching mournful strings,  
 They likewise are a kind of kings,  
 Nor is their empire all a dream.

"Their words fly over land and main,  
 Their warblings make the distance glad,  
 Their voices heard hereafter add  
 A glory to a glorious reign.

"A work not done by flattering state  
 Nor such a lay should kings receive  
 And kingly Poets should believe  
 The king's heart true as he is great.

"The taskwork ode has ever fail'd:  
 Not less the king in time to come  
 Will seem the greater under whom  
 The sacred Poets have prevail'd.

"I thank you that your Royal Grace  
 To one of less desert allows  
 This laurel greener from the brows  
 Of him that utter'd nothing base.

“I would I were as those of old  
 A mellow mouth of song to fill  
 Your reign with music wh might still  
 Be music when my lips were cold.

“That after men might turn the page  
 And light on fancies true & sweet  
 And kindle with a loyal heat  
 To fair Victoria’s golden age.

“But he your Laureate who succeeds  
 A master such as all men quote  
 Must feel as one of slender note  
 And piping low among the reeds.

“Yet if your greatness & the care  
 That yokes with splendour yield you time  
 To seek in this your Poet’s rhyme  
 If aught of good or sweet be there

“Take, Madam, this poor book of song,  
 For tho’ the faults were thick as dust  
 In vacant chambers I could trust  
 Your kindness. May you rule us long

“And leave us scions of your blood  
 As noble till the latest day.  
 May children of our children say  
 She wrought her people lasting good.”

Concerning the stanzas thus shown—mere trial stanzas, in which, and by means of which, the poet was feeling for his way—three things irresistibly suggest themselves to be said: First, it is nothing short of astonishing that such a master of poetic art as Tennyson should ever, in the first instance, have written those stanzas, in even the most tentative, provisional way; second, it is almost more astonishing that, having written them, he should ever have allowed them



to pass out of his hands; and, finally, it is not less astonishing, though now it is delightfully astonishing, that, out of such stanzas, should have been evolved the well-nigh perfectly artistic, the truly noble and beautiful, poem that we have in the lines inscribed "To the Queen."

It is perhaps a severe enough criticism of the foregoing stanzas to say that they bear a distinctly amateurish character. One is tempted to say, more severely, that they are dolefully commonplace, that they even approach the level of doggerel verses. How misbecoming the swagger of the first two lines, written evidently to prepare the way for the next two lines with their ascription to the queen! But the phrase, "in this world," is so ambiguous as to render the preparation ineffective. That phrase was apparently meant by the poet to refer to the "world" of the "Saxo Norman race"; but it is at least equally capable of being taken in the larger sense of this whole world of mankind. But how bald and blunt, how lacking in any delicacy of tact working through graceful indirection, the two lines of open address to the queen! Then what immediately follows, like what has already been said by the poet, is really less praise of the queen than boast on behalf of the nation. It comes too near being pure British braggadocio. The third stanza, in which the "Poets" (with a capital P) appear, is in a similar vein of vaunt, but vaunt, oh, how little redeemed by any quasi-modest felicity of expression! The poet, indeed, seems to feel himself floundering in meshes of obstruction from which he struggles hopelessly to get free; or rather perhaps caught in a quicksand in which all the movements that he makes

only sink him deeper and deeper in the bathos beneath him. He, helplessly as it were, and half against his will, confesses, as if from his own present experience, "The taskwork ode has ever fail'd." Then abruptly, not having at all led up to it, he, so to speak, makes a fresh start with, "I thank you that your Royal Grace," etc. This stanza will be recognized as one incorporated, with very slight change, into the final form of the poem. The preceding six stanzas were all well "cast as rubbish to the void." The allusion happily made to Wordsworth, Tennyson's predecessor in the laureateship, inveigled the poet into a digressive strain of three stanzas too egoistic (under a mask of self-depreciation) to be either dignified or graceful, and then a strain is struck which turned out well enough to yield three stanzas that, with touches of alteration, could be retained for the final definitive form of the poem. The three new stanzas added for the conclusion are in every respect fit and admirable. They at once praise and loyally admonish the queen, under the form of good wishes for the true glory of her reign. Nothing could be better. The music of the stanzas is as noble as is their tone of thought and feeling—and nobler could not be desired.

The very attentive reader of the present criticism will have noted that, in first speaking of this poem, as finally published by the poet, I praised it highly for its artistic excellence—highly, yet not without reservation. Of the necessary reservation I need now to speak—for it is connected with that artistic peculiarity in Tennyson's work of which this whole paper has largely been an extended exemplification; namely, the force he so prevailingly puts upon his modes of

expression. The force he uses is not simply force put upon words, or put upon phrases, to compel them to express some meaning in an unnatural way, but often it is a force exerted to bring about a certain not-natural connection of thought, or even to bring about progress without any true connection of thought. The final form of the poem here under discussion presents instances of force applied in the manner now pointed out.

“Victoria—*since* your royal grace” (so the second stanza reads), “To one of less desert allows,” etc. This is followed by a stanza continuing the same sentence, which reads, “*And* should your greatness,” etc., next a third stanza, still in the same sentence, commencing, “Then—while,” etc.—after which comes at length what the reader has been waiting for, a fifth stanza inviting her Gracious Majesty the queen to make a trial of the volume of verse which her dutiful laureate is just publishing. In other words, we have what our friends the grammarians would call a *protasis* extending through four successive stanzas, and then an *apodosis* disposed of in less than one stanza. The syntax and the sequence of thought will more plainly appear if we retrench the matter, however fit and beautiful, that interrupts and suspends progress in expression. Thus retrenching such matter, we have this result: “Victoria, *since* you let me be laureate, *and* should you be able to look at a little modern verse, *then—while* it still is early spring—*take* my own *poor book* of song.” That assuredly could not be well described as a series of what Horace would call *callidæ juncturæ*. But it is a fairly representative specimen of the force that Tennyson not seldom permits him-

self to apply in constructing the order of his verse. His similes and comparisons he is not, as a rule, equally free to force. It, however, happens that just here he does indulge in a forced comparison. He says, "tho' the faults were thick as dust In vacant chambers." Now dust does, no doubt, tend to become "thick" in chambers long left vacant and undisturbed; but it does not become thick in a way to make it suitable for use in the comparison that the poet institutes; it accumulates in layers of gradual deposit, and obviously faults in verse can not be conceived as "thick" in any such sense as that. "May you rule us long," the poem loyally, and with all felicity as well as simplicity, proceeds to say. This perfectly fit good wish is not at all led up to. It comes in with absolute abruptness. "I could trust Your kindness. May you rule us long," is the connection, or lack of connection, in thought. I leave other obscurely imperfect consecutions of thought unnoted, but it seems desirable, for confirmation of the view here presented concerning Tennyson's practise of violence in making his connections, as well as in using words and phrases, to point out the utter unrelatedness, to its fellows in the stanza, of the noble and beautiful last line of the poem, "And compass'd by the inviolate sea." Victoria's statesmen have, in the happy augury of the poem, been shaping "some august decree" that has the effect to keep her throne unshaken—settled, and firm, in happy harmony with the principles of popular government; and then comes in a thought for the prosperity of the queen and of her land, related not at all to any legislation devised by astute statesmen, but solely to the favorable insular situation of Great Britain—not at all so related, unless



indeed it be supposed that in this line some intimation was meant to be conveyed by the poet that in his opinion the "august decree" should, at any rate, provide for adequate coast defense!

## VII

SINCE writing thus far, and arriving near the finish of the present paper, I have had an interesting and instructive experience, in fresh, and, as it quite unexpectedly turned out, somewhat critical, study of the "In Memoriam," conducted with the association of chance utterly-inexperienced companionship. It fell out on this wise: A young woman whom I may describe as an unusually bright-minded, frank, and genuine young woman, not prepossessed with disqualifying impressions mistaken by her for opinions on literary matters—to an inquiry from me whether she liked Tennyson's "In Memoriam" replied that she did not understand it. I lightly proposed that she take a lesson in the poem with me. She gladly assented, saying that she should like to understand and enjoy it. We made short work with the poem, although two lines excited some remark. "Thine are these orbs of light and shade," we found ourselves agreed in being surprised to have the poet himself (in his "annotations") explain as referring to the sun and moon. I had to admit that the expression was a forced one to bear that sense, or indeed any sense whatever discoverable by us. "Confusions of a wasted youth," my fellow student desired an explanation of. I haltingly said I supposed the poet, in modesty, or in humility

rather before God, was willing to regard his verses as a series of somewhat blindly ineffectual attempts at uttering his mind, and to feel that he had wasted his youth in writing them. "Did he really take that view of his work? Did he not go beyond the truth of his feeling when he said that?" I was surprised into admiration of the thoughtfulness that my young friend displayed in asking these questions. Her "open eyes desired the truth," and what could I say? I told her I thought a little exaggeration of modesty, or of humility before God, might be excused to a poet; but she seemed to persist in thinking that just simple truth was the thing required.

The first canto of the poem proper seemed more, or certainly not at all less, violent, in our joint study of it, than it had seemed to me when I wrote the criticism of it given in preceding paragraphs of this paper. In addition, we were together struck with the syntactical awkwardness of the comparison, "sweeter to be drunk with loss" "than *that* the Victor Hours should boast." When we advanced to the consideration of the second canto—which consists of an address to the "Old Yew"—I was obliged to admit that I could assign no reason for the introducing of this passage, except that the poem was concerned with the subject of death, and that a yew was a graveyard tree. The Tennysonian violence accordingly appeared in the mere fact that such a passage was introduced at all. Then why the various things should be said that were said to the yew, did not readily seem clear. The connection and sequence of thought could not by either of us be made to come out very satisfactorily. "Hardihood"—that word, doubtless the key-word to the

whole canto—was a veritable stumbling-block. What did it mean? There could not, in view of the purpose of the poet, be any doubt what he would have it mean. He would have it mean impassivity, insensibility, capacity to abide unaffected by influence either from without or from within. But can “hardihood” fairly be made to mean that? Fairly or not, it should mean that, Tennyson decided, or rather the necessity of rhyme decided for him. “Sick for” “hardihood”—we found that also to be a stumbling-block. “Sick with longing for thy stubborn hardihood” must, we said, be the sense intended by the poet, and I could recall a line from “The Princess,” “Sick for the hollies and the yews of home,” in confirmation of that interpretation—where, however, the word “home” helps to the idea of homesickness.

Tennyson used to testify to a capacity that he had of passing, as it were, out of his normal consciousness and getting quite transcendental experiences of things beyond this visible diurnal sphere. He must have drawn upon this unique idiosyncratic capacity of his, to be able to feel himself failing from out his blood—by the way, yet another decidedly forced expression—and growing incorporate into that “old yew.” With all practicable reverence for our poet, we two students of his verse could not bring ourselves to realize that there was anything more valuable than a not very poetical whimsy of his in this concluding stanza of the canto. But along with such reluctant surrender of its culminating stanza went necessarily surrender of the whole yew-tree canto.

I will not further pursue this unexpectedly-resumed examination of the poem. I have sufficiently indicated

the character of remarkable violence to expression that pervades it—by no means always to the injury of the poetic effect, nay, not seldom to the advantage of that effect. Still the “In Memoriam” is on the whole the fine poem that it is, in spite of the unnatural force put so abundantly in it upon expression, and not because of such departure from the natural norm of language.

### VIII

I SHOULD greatly regret it if, justly to my own disadvantage indeed, rather than to that of the poet, I should make on any reader the impression that I unduly underrate either the poetic or the merely artistic merit and value of this great master in verse. I value Tennyson very highly indeed, but my wish is to value him truly. A friend of mine, exceptionally well equipped both by native gift and by discipline in art, to judge justly in such matters as those involved in the present criticism, asked me, after giving thoughtful, maturely thoughtful, consideration to what I had written, not only on Tennyson, but on Matthew Arnold and on Milton—asked me then a pregnant question. He asked me, “What poet is there whom you would name for an example of poet that avoids such faults and shortcomings as those which you, fairly I admit, prove upon Tennyson?” I was compelled to reply that I could name no one for an example of poet that wholly avoids such flaws of imperfection in his artistic production. But I named our American Bryant as a poetic artist more nearly impeccable in all such respects than almost any other



known to me. But there is a very important difference between Bryant and Tennyson to be taken into the account, in any fair comparison of the two as artists in verse. Tennyson has attempted more—far more—in his verse than has Bryant in his. He has attempted things more difficult, and things more difficult in immensely greater variety. Indeed, in the range and variety of his undertakings in verse, Tennyson surpasses, I am inclined to think, any peer whatever of his, modern or ancient, in poetic art. This fact, if it is a fact—and I am sure it comes very near to being a fact—is an element of capital importance in adjudging to him his true rank among poetic artists—especially if his amazingly various undertakings have been—and I think they mainly have been—notably successful.

It is true of Tennyson himself, far beyond the measure in which it is true of Goethe (as to whom it was that Tennyson said it), that he sings “to one clear harp in divers tones.” The compass of Tennyson’s singing voice in verse is extraordinary. It is greatly more extraordinary than I have ever seen it praised as being. I have just been taking a fresh survey of his work with a view to estimating rightly his achievement in various kinds of poetic and artistic attempt. The result is somewhat unexpected even to myself. The Tennysonian violence of expression I seem to have found markedly less almost everywhere else in his verse than it is in the “*In Memoriam*.” This difference I attribute in great part to the fact that in the “*In Memoriam*” the undertaking of the poet was greatly more arduous than it was anywhere else in the whole volume of his verse. The less difficult things

that he attempted he achieved with comparatively little strain put upon normal idiomatic expression. Indeed, I think it would, on careful comparison of one production of his with another, be found that the characteristic Tennysonian violence to language varies pretty accurately in amount and in degree according to the relative difficulty encountered by the poet in uttering his thought. How graceful, how charmingly easy, in fancy and in phrasing, is "The Talking Oak," is "The Day-Dream"! No departure from the ordinary way of expressing oneself except such departure as consists in the distinction of perfect naturalness reconciled with exquisite felicity. In "Will Waterproof's Monologue," the poet descends to as humble a moral tone as he does anywhere else in his verse, but how admirably he succeeds in adapting the form to the sense! From this piece what a rise, through "Enone," "A Vision of Sin," "The Two Voices," "The Palace of Art," to the "In Memoriam" and the "Guinevere"!

I find myself tempted to a series of admiring exclamations—which, should I yield to the temptation, would seem hardly critical—when I survey the wide and varied tract of Tennyson's poetic production.

Between, for example, "The Gardener's Daughter" and any one of his dialect pieces, say, "Northern Farmer"—"Old Style" or "New Style"—what a chasm of difference and contrast! It does not seem possible that the same imagination, the same skill of craftsmanship, produced both kinds and kept them throughout so immeasurably distinct. My own personal observation does not enable me to pronounce upon the faithfulness to reality achieved in the dialect

itself in which the "Northern Farmer" pieces are written. They have, however, a self-evidencing quality in them which completely satisfies my sense of what was required. And as for the sentiment of them, the tone of thought and of feeling, they are perfection itself. It was a veritable stroke of genius when the poet made the resonant clatter of the horse's ironed hoofs spell the word "Proputty, proputty, proputty"—"that's what I 'ears 'em saäy," as the hard-headed old father expressed it to his "ass" of a son. Tennyson, condescending to do the dialect of an Irishman, brought himself somewhat within the range of my personal observation and experience, and I feel warranted in testifying that the verisimilitude is adequate.

A quite different contrast, but one perhaps quite equally striking, holds between "The Gardener's Daughter" and "St. Simeon Stylites." This chasm of contrast is after a manner bridged by "Dora," between the two, with its severe simplicity standing as a kind of midway pier to divide the span that stretches from this to that. The endlessly-varying form of verse, always exquisitely reponsive in each case to the demand of the subject and the treatment, presents as just a claim for admiration as does the matter of the thought or the fancy expressed.

I do not speak of the dramatic pieces, for to confess the truth—the shameful truth—I have not read them. I have tried several times to read them, but my mind instinctively, and, as it were, obstinately, refuses to accomplish the task. I do not say this as a form of criticism. The plays may, for aught I know, be very good indeed. But I have what I think must be an incurable congenital incapacity for enjoying anything

literary that is cast in the dramatic form. I never have read any play, not even one of Shakespeare's, with pleasure—passages in plays, yes; but plays as wholes, never. So I simply abstain from comment on Tennyson's plays further than to say that of course his dramatic works add an important illustration of Tennyson's vast versatility in poetic production.

I have indicated by a few instances of extremes in contrast the immense difference, as of the whole heaven, that lies between this and that of Tennyson's achievement in verse. But it needs additionally to be said that all the interspace that separates these extremes—which is nothing less than the whole diameter of possible contrast—is filled with productions touching one another throughout the entire distance and constituting thus a continuous connective chain. The compass, therefore, of Tennyson's genius and achievement in poetic art is so great that, however it may be equaled by another, it can never be surpassed by any. The one thing that lacks to make Tennyson's poetic fame ascendent and supreme, is the triumphant production of some poem indisputably great as a great imaginative whole—the projection, so to speak, of a new world into space by the exertion of a true creative power of the poetic mind. Everything less than this greatest thing is amply supplied in the abundant volume of his verse. But that mystery of genius whereby supposably he might through mere self-withdrawal have illusively magnified his fame, he has himself, to a great degree, dispelled by showing, through some few surprising telltale examples, how large a part, in the final triumphs that he achieved, was played in his case by sheer honest hard work. I do not think that we



ought to depress our estimation of either his merit or his value, in consequence of the revelation that he has made of his dependence upon effort in perfecting the results of his genius. Rightly regarded, genius at work is a more inspiring spectacle than genius at play. It is genius at work, far rather than genius at play, that gives us truly great, securely long-enduring, poetry.

Tennyson, then, let us conclude, though demonstrably he is not a poetic artist without flaw in his work, is yet, on the whole, the greatest artist in lyric verse that thus far has ever appeared in the world. If he is not this, who, I may unmovedly ask, is the greater ?

I can not feel either shame or regret that I have been overwhelmed, by this communion with Tennyson's genius, to belie somewhat the announcement with which I began that I should leave all praise of him latent and silent as an axiomatic postulate to be everywhere understood throughout the paper. The postulate has refused to be dumb. It had to cry out. Tennyson's fame is as secure as is Milton's—and this in spite of his son's biography of him.

EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN  
AS MAN OF LETTERS



## EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN AS MAN OF LETTERS

### I

MR. STEDMAN'S death is too recent for the still-persisting influence of his charming personality not in some degree to affect the feeling, if not the judgment, of one who, like the present writer, having loved the living man, now attempts to assay carefully, and candidly appraise, the literary work that he accomplished. The personal sentiment toward the subject treated, in which this criticism will necessarily be conducted is given expression in the following memorial sonnet which the present writer contributed to *Putnam's Monthly*, and which the publishers of that periodical kindly permit to be reproduced here:

“Girded, alert, blithe, suavely blithe, and bland;  
A vivid spirit; keen, importunate  
On whatsoever gallant quest; elate  
Most, prospering on a quest of phrasings grand  
Or graceful, which in happy marriage-band  
Might noble meaning with smooth music mate,  
Through deftly-braided measures delicate,  
With here of humor, pathos there, a strand—

“Such was our Stedman; finer spirit none  
Illumined ever any century  
Of letters; not effulgent like the sun,



Like a star rather, softly radiant, he.  
 What fitter finish, his fame fairly won,  
 Life to the full his—that euthanasy!"

Stedman did his literary work partly in verse and partly in prose. His prose production was chiefly, indeed his most important prose production was almost exclusively, critical, and it concerned itself altogether with poetry. Verse accordingly appears to have been his controlling literary interest. It hardly need be said that he himself valued his verse beyond his prose, or at least that he considered verse rather than prose his true idiom of expression. This would, I suppose, be found to be the case with every literary producer capable of writing poetry. Like Lowell, Stedman, when he came to the retrospect of his approximately finished career, pathetically felt that he had not given himself to poetry as he would wish to have done. Wordsworth's lines—long familiar to me through my having once met them in anonymous quotation, but not recognized by me until very lately as Wordsworth's—have affecting truth in them:

"Works incomplete and purposes betrayed  
 Make sadder transits o'er Truth's mystic glass  
 Than noblest monuments of art decayed."

(Involuntarily, I began to set down these lines here, not as Wordsworth wrote them, but as for many years I have been unconsciously, and, it would seem, constructively, misremembering them. For the sake of fidelity and accuracy I give them now corrected according to the original:

"Things incomplete and purposes betrayed  
 Make sadder transits o'er Thought's optic glass  
 Than noblest objects utterly decayed.")

The diversion of Stedman from his conscious calling as poet was due, in part, to the necessity he felt of providing himself an independent income more ample than he could reasonably hope to realize as the reward of his fidelity to the Muse. He became a banker (or more strictly a broker) and he met with success beyond what could have been predicted for one who instinctively valued "mellow meters more than cent for cent." Then, too, besides the distraction of his mind from the poet's art unavoidably involved in daily attention to the conduct of an exacting business, there were the undertakings in criticism to which he was drawn, and which by degrees became increasingly serious in his hands. Moreover, he devoted precious time and precious strength to the editing of various publications, some of them issued in series of volumes: "A Library of American Literature," "The Works of Edgar Allan Poe," "A Victorian Anthology," "An American Anthology." Yet again, he invested his energy in a course of lectures on poetry, first delivered at Johns Hopkins University, and afterward at Columbia University, and at the University of Pennsylvania. These lectures in due time became a book, "The Nature and Elements of Poetry." Not less serious, perhaps, for withdrawal of energy on his part from the task of producing poetry, was the service he rendered to the cause at once of social culture and of letters and art by opening his hospitable home in New York for weekly receptions, to which all suitably-qualified persons were graciously and gracefully welcomed by a genial host and a like-minded hostess, his wife. For years Stedman was recognized and honored as a kind of dean of letters for New York and its suburbs.

It was partly in this quality of his, but partly also in his quality as a scholar among scholars, that Stedman, with a very few others not members of that sodality of scholarship, was invited to be present at a dinner given by the famous Greek Club in New York, to celebrate an anniversary—I think it was the thirtieth—of its founding. I was present, as having been member of the club, though at that time an active member no longer. The occasion was, in the Horatian sense of the Horatian phrase, a supper of the gods. We prolonged our symposium till an hour so late that the last train had gone by which I could reach my home that night up river at Tarrytown. It happened that I had been placed at table *vis-à-vis* with Stedman, to whom I spoke across and said, “I think you and I have never actually met before.” “Oh, yes, we have,” he promptly replied, and when I insisted a little, he insisted in counter, and so the point was dropped between us, neither, I suppose, convinced, certainly not I. The fact was that Mr. Gilder, in those early days when *The Century Magazine* so entitled was not, and years were yet to elapse before *Scribner’s Monthly* would, by simple change of name, become that great periodical—Mr. Gilder, then assistant editor, as lieutenant of Dr. J. G. Holland, editor-in-chief, used to talk to me of Stedman, and perhaps he may also have spoken to Stedman of me—whence, as I suppose, it came about that Stedman was under the impression that we had personally met. When the anniversary dinner-party was breaking up, Stedman and I casually came together face to face. “And now what are you going to do?” he briskly, and with a charming effect of comradery, asked. “Well, my last train up has left,

and I am going to a hotel," I said. "No, you are not going to a hotel," said he; "you have no baggage; you can not go to a hotel respectably. You are going home with me." It was so irresistibly captivating in its frank cordiality that of course I surrendered at discretion and went.

The incident exhibits Stedman so happily, in the characteristic charm of his personal spirit and manner, that it seemed worth relating—especially as it leads naturally to mention of what seems to me a very fine, perhaps even the very finest, specimen existing of Stedman's artistic craftsmanship at once in prose and in verse. I mean his discussion of the relation between Tennyson and Theocritus. Stedman had made a careful study of the Greek poet for the purpose of writing that paper of his. He had even assembled texts, and commentaries, and translations, enough to constitute a pretty complete critical apparatus for bringing out a scholarlike edition of Theocritus in the original Greek. These he showed to me that night, and admitted, unless I remember wrong a conversation of many years ago, that he had at one time seriously entertained the idea of doing this work, with the accompaniment—a unique feature it would have been—of a version of the Syracusan's idylls in English blank verse. "Works incomplete and purposes betrayed"!

The "Tennyson and Theocritus" paper was first published in *The Atlantic Monthly*. In it Stedman appeared very advantageously in the threefold quality of scholar, critic, and poet. I feel that I should make the quality fourfold, and add that he appeared, as with him could not fail, in the quality of gentleman;



the urbanity of the paper made the tone of it delightful. If Stedman had been less urbane, in his disclosures of apparent indebtedness on Tennyson's part to Theocritus, his paper might have seemed a reclamation in favor of the Greek to the disadvantage of the Englishman. Stedman was too loyal a lover both of Tennyson's genius and of his art to say or to imply anything anywhere to the disparagement of either. Tennyson, in fact, was to Stedman master and teacher in poetry, his *Magnus Apollo*, at whose altar he always delighted to sacrifice.

## II

HIS "Tennyson and Theocritus" essay Stedman very properly included in his volume "The Victorian Poets," where it was introduced as a kind of sequel and supplement to his more general treatment of Tennyson. He frankly acknowledged that it was there somewhat in the nature of an "Excursus," but the reader of it feels that it could not have been omitted. Stedman, in his criticisms, and notably in his university lectures on poetry, yielded to an ambition of largeness in his views. The unfriendly critic might feel at times warranted to say that here was an ostentation, an overweening pretension, on Stedman's part. And I will not deny that in his effort to rise to a lofty standing-ground commanding wide-sweeping range of view Stedman does occasionally lose his footing and become vague to the point of unintelligible. But when, in pointing out the resemblance between the time of Theocritus and the time of Tennyson—that is,

between the Alexandrian age and the Victorian—he writes such a sentence as the following, summarizing the characteristics of the ancient civilization under Ptolemy Philadelphus, he shows plainly enough that he can be at once general and definite:

“In material growth it was indeed a ‘wondrous age,’ an era of inventions, travel, and discovery; the period of Euclid and Archimedes; of Ptolemy, with his astronomers; of Hiero, with his galleys long as clipper-ships; of academies, museums, theaters, lecture-halls, gymnasia; of a hundred philosophies; of geographers, botanists, casuists, scholiasts, reformers, and what not—all springing into existence and finding support in the luxurious, speculative, bustling, news-devouring hurly-burly of that strangely modern Alexandrian time.”

In contrast and relief of the eager practical spirit so described by Stedman as characterizing the time in which Theocritus flourished, the lovely pastoral environment of the Sicilian poet is set off by his American admirer in the following charming bit of local color:

“A poet of original and abounding genius [“a single exception,” he, Stedman says, to the general prosaicism of the age], nurtured in the beautiful island of Sicily, where the sky and sea are bluer, the piny mountains, with *Ætna* at their head, more kingly, the breezes fresher, the rivulets more musical, and the upland pastures greener than upon any other shores which the Mediterranean borders—such a poet felt himself inspired to utter a fresh and native melody, even in that overlearned and bustling time.”

After an adequate brief setting like that, to place Theocritus in his proper landscape as pastoral poet, it seems hardly necessary that the critic should quote, as he does, a passage from Charles Kingsley—a fine passage it is—to much the same import. This indulgence of surplusage may be taken as fair indication of

a tendency quite prevalent with Stedman, alike in his prose and in his verse, to let his expression run on into an abundance which at times borders on prolixity.

The present writer must ask his reader to remember that the following unconnected fragments of translation by Stedman from Theocritus were introduced by the translator to serve as hints of indebtedness on Tennyson's part to his antique Grecian predecessor. I show a few of these fragments, without giving the corresponding parallels found by Stedman in Tennyson to the Greek originals in Theocritus—my object in thus showing them being simply to illustrate the fine poetic craftsmanship displayed by the translator; I omit the references to the Theocritan text which Stedman faithfully supplies:

“How fair to thee the gentle-footed Hours  
Have brought Adonis back from Acheron!  
Sweet Hours, and slowest of the Blessed Ones:  
But still they come desired, and ever bring  
Gifts to all mortals.”

“Here, if you come, your feet shall tread on wool,  
The fleece of lambs, softer than downy Sleep.”

“Here are the oaks, and here is galingale,  
Here bees are sweetly humming near their hives;  
Here are twin fountains of cool water; here  
The birds are prattling on the trees—the shade  
Is deeper than beyond; and here the pine  
From overhead casts down to us its cones.”

“More sweetly will you sing  
Propt underneath the olive, in these groves.  
Here are cool waters plashing down, and here  
The grasses spring; and here, too, is a bed  
Of leafage, and the locusts babble here.”

"When the gray deep has sounded, and the sea  
 Climbs up in foam and far the loud waves roar,  
 I seek for land and trees, and flee the brine;  
 And earth to me is welcome: the dark wood  
 Delights me, where, although the great wind blow,  
 The pine-tree sings. An evil life indeed  
 The fisherman's, whose vessel is his home,  
 The sea his toil, the fish his wandering prey.  
 But sweet to me to sleep beneath the plane  
 Thick-leaved; and near me I would love to hear  
 The babble of the spring, that murmuring  
 Perturbs him not, but is the woodman's joy."

Stedman once described himself to me, with half-humorous exaggeration, as having been, at a certain stage of his development, "abjectly Tennysonian." It certainly may be doubted whether the foregoing fragments of blank verse from his pen would have taken the form and tone that they exhibit if Tennyson had not been what he was to Stedman. I find nothing in the whole volume of his critical expression finer in discernment and in feeling than some passages in his criticism of Tennyson. Take the following passage; certainly no critic that was not also a poet could have written it:

"It [the cycle of the "Idylls of the King"] is the epic of chivalry—the Christian ideal of chivalry which we have deduced from a barbaric source—our conception of what knighthood should be, rather than what it really was; but so skilfully wrought of high imaginings, fairy spells, fantastic legends, and medieval splendors, that the whole work, suffused with the Tennysonian glamour of golden mist, seems like a chronicle illuminated by saintly hands, and often blazes with light like that which flashed from the holy wizard's book when the covers were unclasped."

That, I submit, is as fine a delicately sympathetic appreciation of the poetry of the "Idylls of the King"



as could be desired. Of the poetry of the "Idylls," I say; of the poem as a whole—but I feel at once that I can not use that language, I can not speak of the "Idylls" as a poem. Poems they are, but poem in my opinion they are not. I think, therefore, that Stedman missed it—that is to say, failed as a critic—when he accepted as successful the attempt of Tennyson to weld his "Idylls" into an epic. They have not the coherence, the progressive development, the unity, the major tone, the elevation in subject-matter, that it is indispensably necessary for a true epic to have. Given his stories, nothing could exceed the charm with which Tennyson invested them, but the stories themselves fall far below the key on which a true epic must be pitched. I am disposed to except the "Guinevere" in saying this. That "Idyll" is susceptible of an allegorical interpretation which lifts it to a transcendent height. I myself always read it with such an interpretation in mind, and, so reading it, I am moved by it more profoundly than by any other poem that I know. It becomes to me the acme of the morally sublime and pathetic.

I show one more passage from Stedman's criticism. This time it is a passage in which the critic makes a return upon himself, and points out a qualification which he thinks, and in my opinion justly thinks, must be permitted to limit our admiration of Tennyson. This qualification he seems to make general, as applicable everywhere to Tennyson's verse. I, for my part, feel it to be particularly applicable to the "Idylls of the King."

"There are times when a tart apple, a crust of bread, a bit of wild honey, are worth more to us than all the delicacies of

the larder. We wish more rugged outbreaks, more impetuous discords; we listen for the sudden irregular trill of the thicket songster. The fulness of Tennyson's art evades the charm of spontaneity. How rarely he takes you by surprise! His stream is sweet, assured, strong; but how seldom the abrupt bend, the plunge of the cataract, the thunder and the spray! Doubtless he has enthusiasms, but all are held in hand; college-life, study, restraint, comfort, reverence, have done their work upon him. He is well broken, as we say of a thoroughbred—proud and true, and, though he makes few bursts of speed, keeps easily forward, and is sure to be first at the stand."

Of Matthew Arnold's poetry Stedman expresses judgments which seem to me to be not well-considered; at any rate, judgments which I account critically wrong. Thus, after saying, I hold justly, that, as between Arnold and Thomas Hood, Hood "was the truer poet," but objecting that "three-fourths of his productions never should have been written," he says "there scarcely is a line of Arnold's which is not richly worth preserving." "Sohrab and Rustum" he pronounces a "majestic poem." "The descriptive passage at the close," he says, "for diction and breadth of tone would do honor to any living poet." No one that reads what in other pages of this book I say of Matthew Arnold's poetry in general, and of "Sohrab and Rustum" in particular, will need assuring that at these points I differ with Stedman as widely as possible. I think, moreover, that he is more tolerant, not to say eulogistic, of Walt Whitman's "poetry" than is comfortable with the true standard of appreciation in criticism. This is not to imply that in my own opinion there is not genuine stuff of poetry in Whitman's verse—I feel like quoting also even that word, "verse," when I speak of this man's production. Of

course Stedman's instincts as a scholar, a poetic artist, and a gentleman, saved him from attaching himself to the Whitman cult. He is far off from being "abjectly" a Whitmanite. But his fondness for breadth in comprehension, and, besides that, his disposition to follow where redoubtable names lead, or, perhaps I should say rather, his natural and habitual complaisance, brought him to an attitude toward Whitman more sympathetic than independently and justly critical.

### III

IN general, it may, I think, without derogation from Stedman's true merit, be said that, both as poet and as critic, he lacks the desirable boldness and firmness to strike out paths peculiarly his own. His is a secondary, a dependent, genius. Consequently his reader never feels the tonic reaction of a fresh dissenting view propounded in criticism, never the encounter of something in his verse fitted to give one a sensation of delightful shock and surprise,

"As when a great thought strikes along the brain  
And flushes all the cheek."

Whether as critic or as poet, it is a lunar, not a solar, light that he sheds. From not a few of his critical estimates, other than the ones instanced above, sometimes those of poets considered in the totality of their production, sometimes of particular poems, sometimes even of particular passages in poems, I find myself compelled to dissent. Stedman's knowledge of poetical literature was immense, but it was apparently knowledge acquired through extensive, rather than through intensive, study of it. His judg-

ments seem often to me not sufficiently considered. The phrase "breadth of tone," used by him in praising the close of the "Sohrab and Rostum," betrays him, I think. At least I have not been able to attach to that phrase a definite meaning. Can a "tone" be "broad"? Breadth of view, breadth of treatment, breadth of comprehension, for example, are phrases that I easily construe. But "breadth of tone" baffles me when I try to make it yield me a clear sense. It was, I judge, just a careless fling at expression, conceived in a characteristic spirit of offhand generous praise. Stedman's taste was sure; he had, in fact, every qualification for being a good critic except long patience of deep thought, and, I must also add, willingness and boldness to differ. His "Victorian Poets" is a work covering a vast field, and attempting to cover it with impartially minute attention to names almost without number. It is a wonder that attempting so much he acquitted himself so well. It was scarcely possible that he should not sometimes commit himself to expressions of opinion about a poet or a poem without having considered sufficiently.

A curious example of interpretative inadvertence on his part was anonymously made note of by me in a paper written for inclusion in the present volume but finally reserved for future publication—a paper on Milton's art in epic verse. That paper was written while Stedman was still living, and though my allusion to him was carefully couched in such terms as not even in the remotest, obscurest manner to point him out to anybody's conjecture, still I thought well to make sure of not disturbing Stedman's mind, and I did so by sending to him a copy of my purposed words,



begging him to tell me frankly if he would rather not have me print them. The inadvertence referred to concerned Milton's line, "Or of the Eternal coeternal beam." It occurs in two different places of "The Nature and Elements of Poetry": "The radiant conception of the Eternal coeternal beam," p. 117; "The Florentine bard soars at last within the effulgence of the eternal, coeternal beam," p. 245—I follow exactly in both citations the typography of the book. Those expressions, of course, both of them, imply a misunderstanding of Milton's sense. Milton's sense was, 'beam of the Eternal coeternal with himself'; whereas Stedman, making both "eternal" and "coeternal" adjectives qualifying "beam," in effect quite deprives the line, looked at as a whole, of any intelligible sense whatever. I ought to say that I had already, years before, called his attention to the inadvertence, which had been twice noticed by me as the lectures, after delivery, appeared month by month in *The Century Magazine*. I suggested that he might be glad to reconsider his implied interpretation of Milton's line before publication in volume, a form of publication which I assumed was in his purpose. He replied, thanking me, but lamenting that it was already too late, for the present, since the plates were made and indeed the printing of the sheets was that moment in progress. Here are his *ipsissima verba*: "Alas! the work is stereotyped and the body-text even now printing at the Riverside Press. It is too late to get around the difficulty you discover. The thing that really *troubles* me is that I have quoted Milton's line to illustrate Dante's genius in distinction from Milton's own. And there are other things which do not suit me in the forth-

coming book upon which I have expended the labor designed to make it a little masterpiece."

Stedman's mind, at the time of his writing thus to me, was so preoccupied with "the thing that really *troubled*" him, that he quite failed to perceive what the "difficulty" was that I "discovered." Fifteen years later, when he received from me a transcript of what it was in my mind to say in the present volume about his inadvertence, he used language necessarily implying the same inadvertence as still misleading his interpretation of Milton's line. He wrote me: "As to your proposed comment, made in so courtly a manner, on what you take to be my interpretation of Milton's 'The Eternal coeternal beam,' whatever you choose to say of me, or of anything I have written, will be accepted by me as an honor and in a hearty spirit of professional comity. Nevertheless, and very likely in consequence of some specific confusion of mind as to this one matter, I can not for the life of me understand what sort of an interpretation you give to this enduring phrase that can be any different from my own." So persistent was Stedman's misconceiving of Milton's line. And no wonder; it had been so long habitual with him. In his poem "Corda Concordia" he has these two telltale lines:

"The coeternal beam  
Of the blind minstrel's dream."

#### IV

THAT was a very happy hit in criticism when, of Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," Stedman said it was "equal to the occasion,"

while in it "rhetoric often is substituted for imagination and richness of thought." He might have added, "*suited*" [as well as "equal"] to the occasion," for it was eminently an occasion that called rather for eloquent rhetoric in verse than for ethereal poetry. In fact, that ode of Tennyson's, while certainly not his most triumphant poetry, is as triumphant a piece of poetic art as even Tennyson himself ever produced.

With a somewhat extended passage of quotation from Stedman's appreciation of Swinburne considered as metrist and rhythmist, I cease either quoting from his criticism, or remarking upon it in particular instances. The passage that I now show exhibits Stedman at his very best, as unboundedly generous, while also exquisitely discerning and just, in praise. I beg the reader to note what an affluence of apt and happy expression Stedman here commands. If the profuseness is felt to flow into diffuseness, that fault, it may be said, if fault it is, was characteristic of Stedman's genius. No critic but one who was himself a practised and a successful wielder of meter and rhythm could have written such an estimation of Swinburne as this:

"It is difficult for any one to write with cold restraint who has an eye to see, an ear to hear, and the practise which forces an artist to wonder at the luster, the melody, the unstinted fire and movement, of his imperious song.

"I wish, then, to speak at some length upon the one faculty in which Swinburne excels any living English poet; in which I doubt if his equal has existed among recent poets of any tongue, unless Shelley be excepted. Or, possibly, some lyrist of the modern French school. This is his miraculous gift of rhythm, his command over the unsuspected resources of a language. That Shelley had a like power is, I think, shown in passages like the

choruses of 'Prometheus Unbound,' but he flourished half a century ago, and did not have (as Swinburne has) Shelley for a predecessor! A new generation, refining upon the lessons given by himself and Keats, has carried the art of rhythm to extreme variety and finish. Were Shelley to have a second career, his work, if no finer in single passages, would have, all in all, a range of musical variations such as we discover in Swinburne's. So close is the resemblance in quality of these two voices, however great the difference in development, as almost to justify a belief in metempsychosis. A master is needed to awake the spirit slumbering in any musical instrument. Before the advent of Swinburne we did not realize the full scope of English verse. In his hands it is like the violin of Paganini. The range of his fantasias, roulades, arias, new effects of measure and sound, is incomparable with anything hitherto known. The first emotion of one who studies even his immature work is that of wonder at the freedom and richness of his diction, the susurrus of his rhythm, his unconscious alliterations, the endless change of his syllabic harmonies—resulting in the alternate softness and strength, height and fall, riotous or chastened music, of his affluent verse. How does he produce it? Who taught him all the hidden springs of melody? He was born a tamer of words—a subduer of this most stubborn, yet most copious of the literary tongues. In his poetry we discover qualities we did not know were in the language—a softness that seemed Italian, a rugged strength we thought was German, a blithe and debonair lightness we despaired of capturing from the French. He has added a score of new stops and pedals to the instrument. He has introduced, partly from other tongues, stanzaic forms, measures, and effects untried before; and has brought out the swiftness and force of meters like the anapestic, carrying each to perfection at a single trial. Words in his hands are like the ivory balls of a juggler, and all words seem to be in his hands. His fellow craftsmen, who alone can understand what has been done in their art, will not term this statement extravagance. Speaking only of his command over language and meter, I have a right to reaffirm, and to show by many illustrations, that he is the most sovereign of rhythmists. He compels the inflexible elements to his use. Chaucer is more limpid, Shakespeare more kingly, Milton loftier at times, Byron



has an unaffected power, but neither Shelley nor the greatest of his predecessors is so dithyrambic, and no one has been in all moods so absolute an autocrat of verse. With equal gifts, I say, none could have been, for Swinburne comes after and profits by the art of all. Poets often win distinction by producing work that differs from what has gone before. It seems as if Swinburne, in this ripe period, resolved to excel others by a mastery of known melodies, adding a new magic to each, and going beyond the range of the farthest. His amazing tricks of rhythm are those of a gymnast outleaping his fellows. We had Keats, Shelley, and Coleridge, after Collins and Gray, and Tennyson after Keats, but now Swinburne adds such elaboration that an art which we thought perfected seems almost tame. In the first place, he was born a prodigy, as much so as Morphy in chess; added to this he is the product of these latter days, a phenomenon impossible before. It is safe to declare that at last a time has come when the force of expression can no further go.

"I do not say that it has not gone too far. The fruit may be, and here is, too luscious; the flower is often of an odor too intoxicating to endure. Yet what execution! Poetry, the rarest poetic feeling, may be found in simpler verse. Yet again, what execution! The voice may not be equal to the grandest music, nor trained and restrained as it should be. But the voice is there, and its possessor has the finest natural organ to which this generation has listened.

"Right here it is plain that Swinburne, especially in his early poems, has weakened his effects by cloying us with excessive richness of epithet and sound; in later works, by too elaborate expression and redundancy of treatment. Still, while Browning's amplification is wont to be harsh and obscure, Swinburne, even if obscure, or when the thought is one that he has repeated again and again, always gives us unapproachable melody and grace. It is true that his glories of speech often hang upon the slightest thread of purpose. He so constantly wants [wishes?] to stop and sing that he gets along slowly with a plot. As we listen to his fascinating music, the meaning, like the libretto of an opera, often passes out of mind. The melody is unbroken; in this, as in other matters, Swinburne's fault is that of excess.

He does not frequently admit the sweet discords, of which he is a master, nor relieve his work by simple, contrasting interludes. Until recently his voice had a narrow range; its effect resulted from changes upon a few notes. The richness of these permutations was a marvel, yet a series of them blended into mannerism."

That long passage is not to be regarded as mere unrestrained eulogy; it is criticism at the same time that it is eulogy. In saying this, I do not have in mind the clauses of qualification introduced here and there by Stedman; I mean that the praise itself is fine, delicately-discerning criticism; it discovers and announces the truth about Swinburne's verse. This, when the whole tenor of the passage is considered; there are, however, minor traits of not quite satisfactory expression, due apparently to lack of absolutely unrelaxed tension of thought on the part of the writer. Thus, to give an example or two, when taking recourse to the rhetorical expedient of comparison and contrast to set off the merit of Swinburne in a stronger light, Stedman says, "Chaucer is more limpid, Shakespeare *more kingly*, Milton *loftier at times*, Byron has an *unaffected power*"—he obviously contents himself with characterizations possessing no value of true distinction. "Unaffected power"! As if "affectation" and "power" *could* go together, as if "power" could be affected! And then it is disappointing to be told, in conclusion of the contrasts, that no predecessor of Swinburne was ever "so dithyrambic" as he. What does "dithyrambic" mean here? Does it mean anything distinguishable from "intense"? Is it praise of Swinburne to imply that he is characteristically "intense"? It is indeed true of Swinburne, whether in verse or in prose. It is therefore sound criticism. But is it

praise? Stedman had prepared us in that sentence to expect praise, not criticism. I recall that John Morley has exclaimed somewhere against the waste of mental energy often involved in quest, on the writer's part, of the ideally best form of expression for his thought. I think that a little more of such "waste" would be good economy of mental expenditure for most writers, as it would have been for Stedman at this point of his criticism of Swinburne. Better expression produces better thought.

## V

I ALWAYS feel as critic a certain responsibility for doing my part toward keeping up among writers the standard of accuracy and of good usage, in diction, in grammar, in all that goes to the making of style. Stedman was by instinct and by habit, in literary conscience also I believe, a man loyal to the claims of scholarship. Few are the slips in his writing that sin against the proprieties of expression. All the more I feel bound to note some instances of such that have met my eye in his pages. I am sorry, for example, to find him using "climacteric" as an adjective answering to the noun "climax." He was Greek scholar enough to know, if he had thought (or if he had cared!), that no such adjective could be formed from the Greek substantive "climax." Poe, to be sure, uses it, but Poe was no such scholar as was Stedman. I am afraid that reprehensible adjective will come in at last, in spite of good example and of protest against it. But witness all readers of what I write, that at

least I will never say "climacteric," however I may desiderate an adjective from "climax" and regret that there is none! "Climactic"? Well, hardly that either, although there is the analogy of "syntactic" from "syntax" to favor such a formation.

I experience both surprise and regret to see the spelling "idyl" persisted in throughout Stedman's text—yes, even in recurrences of Tennyson's title, "Idylls of the King." "Idylls" is so much prettier as a word to look at, and it so much better recalls the Greek from which it is transliterated. And then there is the motive of loyalty to Tennyson. I do not suppose "simplified spelling" had anything to do with Stedman's choice of form. But why make this point? It may not have been Stedman's taste at all, but a rule of the publishing-house—or a preference of compositor, foreman, proof-reader. It is precarious business fixing responsibility in such a case.

It is well-nigh startling to see Owen Meredith's "Lucile" pronounced, without reserve, "quite original." Stedman was very alert, but he somehow seems to have escaped seeing the French original of "Lucile," George Sand's "Lavinia," pointed out in collation with Lytton's work, in the form of the "deadly-parallel" columns. (The curious reader may gratify his curiosity by referring to *The Atlantic Monthly* for January, 1881, pp. 136, 137, and for April, same year, pp. 577, 578.)

He speaks of Milton's "fancies of the *daisies* 'quaint enameled eyes'"—an allusion that I can not understand. In "Lycidas," Milton very fancifully apostrophizes the "valleys low," and bids them: "Throw hither all your quaint enameled eyes." There follows



in "Lycidas" an enumeration of various flowers that the poet would have included among the votive blooms (called by him "quaint enameled eyes") that the "valleys low" are invited to "throw hither"—"to strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies"—but in the list of the flowers named by Milton, and fitted by him with their appropriate adjectives, or descriptive phrases, there occurs no mention of "daisies." Stedman's allusion seems, therefore, a pure freak, and a curious freak it is, of imaginative memory.

In his poem entitled "Crabbed Age and Youth," Stedman rhymes "riches" with "distiches," which involves a mispronunciation that it must have cost the artist and the scholar that the poet was a quail of recoil to admit into his verse—the Greek etymology so decisively forbids any pronunciation but the one that makes the "ch" hard. Of course, too, the trisyllabic plural form "distiches," required alike by the mispronunciation of the *ch* and by the necessity of the rhyme, is a bold freedom of the poet's.

"Now their task is *through*," in the piece entitled "Fuit Ilium," involves a condescension to colloquialism that hardly comports with the purity in diction proper for verse. But such lapses are few in Stedman's pages, and perhaps it is somewhat finical to feel them at all. More serious, perhaps, though certainly still not very serious, is a subtle, unconscious inversion of idiom that occurs in the "Dartmouth Ode." Of the statesman of a lamented former age Stedman says he "held his oath in awe"—as if the "oath" was held "in awe" of himself by the statesman, and not the statesman held in awe by his oath.

But enough of this petty fault-finding with Sted-

man's production, so impeccable in all minor respects as it generally is. It is time now that we turn our attention from the critic to the poet in this man of letters. The bits of delicious blank verse in translation that were incidentally shown in our dealing with the paper on Tennyson and Theocritus, must have roused the interest of readers to see something more of Stedman's poetry.

## VI

STEDMAN began very early to write verse. His first volume was published in 1860—that is, when he was twenty-seven years old. But one poem at least in his collective edition bears the date 1850, which indicates that the author wrote it when he was seventeen years of age. This is entitled "Ode to Pastoral Romance." It has no great value, but it has great merit considered as so juvenile a production. It is especially noteworthy as constituting a perfectly definite whole. It is composed in the conventional irregular form common to odes proper, so-called. It is divided into strophes, six in number, varying in length, as strophes obeying the law of classic precedent should. The idea of personifying "Pastoral Romance" and apostrophizing it through a poem of five pages was distinctly the idea of a young and immature poetic art. "Pastoral Romance" is not a fit subject for personification and apostrophe. Forgetting this error of judgment on the youthful poet's part, one may read the ode with sincere admiration of the result achieved. There is a fine sense displayed of verbal values and of rhythmic effects. So much precocious knowledge

and culture are ingrained in the poem that one is surprised to see in the first strophe such an anachronism, or at least historical displacement, as that which represents star-gazing "Chaldean shepherds" discerning, among the constellations of the sky, "a silvery Venus and a lurid Mars." Read this, the first strophe of the "Ode":

"Queen of the shadowy clime!  
 Thou of the fairy-spell and wondrous lay:  
 Sweet Romance! breathe upon my way,  
 Not with the breath of this degenerate time,  
 But of that age when life was summer play,  
 When Nature wore a verdurous hue,  
 And Earth kept holiday;  
 When on the ground Chaldean shepherds lay,  
 Gazing all night, with calm, creative view,  
 Into the overhanging blue,  
 And found, amid the many twinkling stars,  
 Warriors and maidens fair,  
 Heroes of marvelous deeds and direful wars,  
 Serpents and flaming hair.  
 The Dragon and the Bear,  
 A silvery Venus and a lurid Mars."

How entirely *comme il faut* that is—as to form! I know nothing more so in all the poetry of boyhood. Certainly an instinct for expression in verse was born in Stedman when he was born. But it is the rounded wholeness of the ode that strikes me as the most remarkable thing about it. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is not tentative, a fragment from a large design boldly flung off and left hanging in the air. If an egoism here may be pardoned, I contrast this completed lyric from Stedman's boyish pen with things in verse that I was myself attempting at the same time with Stedman, and at almost exactly the same age

with him. He himself lately called my attention to the fact that we twain had our birthdays the same year, the same month, and within two weeks of each other. Here, for example, are two Spenserian stanzas of my production written at the very moment, neither of us at all aware of the other, when Stedman was writing his "Ode to Pastoral Romance." The difference between them! My stanzas were the dedication of a great poem to be—which never was written!

As when, in isle in ocean far away,  
 Faring o'er wave of his world-wandering tide,  
 Which forlorn mariner, of winds the play,  
 Where its green spot on azure deep doth ride,  
 Spies, and misdeems he spies the enchanted side  
 Of sweet-souled Spenser's western fairy world,  
 Bright dream! him landed greets the gentle pride  
 Of unknown flower, he tendeth well, the curled  
 Wave o'er that stranger flower, where'er his course is  
 hurled;

So, sister mine, summing the mazy throng  
 Of earthly ills, yet heavenward making way,  
 In some far year perhaps this simple song  
 That hies from heart in wondrous merry play,  
 As water welleteth to the pleasant day,  
 Will woo thy small regard with downcast air;  
 In other years, as he the flower, so may  
 Thou very gently cherish it, and bear  
 Its bosomed sweet remembrance wheresoe'er thou fare!

I have wished pathetically in vain that I had come to know Stedman's boyish muse early enough to tell him living how much I admired it for what it indicated in the author. Among the poems not dated but described collectively as "Early Poems," noteworthy are "Penelope," a piece in blank verse, pendant to Ten-



nyson's "Ulysses," and echoing that with truly surprising success; "Flood-Tide" echoing "Locksley Hall"; "The Freshet" echoing the little pastoral idylls of Tennyson. "The Ordeal by Fire" recalls Tennyson's "The Two Voices." These pieces must belong to the period in Stedman's intellectual life when he was what he could describe as "abjectly Tennysonian." Sensitively, sympathetically, responsively Tennysonian, let us say rather. Those productions were really triumphant *tours de force* for a youth. They might almost pass for Tennyson's own. Why is it that a well-nigh ideally perfect imitation in art does not give us as much pleasure as would precisely such a piece presented as a true original from the first artist's hand? Why is not the value equal, though the merit must confessedly be less? By the way, will it seem whimsical if I say that for me Tennyson, in his later "Idylls of the King," has somewhat the effect of being, so to speak, an imitator of himself as he appears in his earlier "Idylls"? The truth is, I think, that he had unconsciously acquired a certain automatic "fatal facility" of writing in just that way, and he indulged himself in it too far. It became at length a kind of helpless mannerism in his hands. His noble epic fragment, the "Morte d'Arthur," reads like an insertion from a different hand, where introduced as part of the cycle vainly trying to be an integral epic poem.

Stedman produced two poems, narrative poems, of considerable length, "Alice of Monmouth," a poem of the Civil War, and "The Blameless Prince," the plot of which, Stedman's own invention, makes it virtually a kind of "Guinevere" inverted; that is, the parts of

prince and princess are exchanged, the prince, reputed blameless, being false like Guinevere, while the princess is a "pure severity of perfect light," like King Arthur. Both these poems are, in point of technical execution, admirable; in point of construction their merit is less conspicuous. Neither poem made a very strong impression on the poetry-reading public. Why this was so it might be interesting to inquire. Perhaps if there had been in them more elemental passion, more power of author's personality, a deeper earnestness pulsing through them from the poet's heart, their fortune might have been different. The note of power is the note that chiefly lacks prevailingly throughout Stedman's production. The charm of purity, of taste, of culture, of scholarship, of urbanity, of right feeling—a manifold blended charm—is abundantly present; but precisely that peculiar sensation of the mind that the encounter of mental and moral puissance in a writer excites, you do not experience in reading Stedman. Read his "Flood-Tide" and then read "Locksley Hall," both written in the same ringing meter, and you recognize the difference that power, personal power, in a poet makes in his poetry.

I have a letter from Stedman of date a little more than ten years old, in which, responding to an expressed wish of mine that he should do so, he indicates his own preferences among his poems. He had previously desired me to do something similar for him, to serve as clue to selection of specimen representative of me in his American anthology. Probably I let him know that what he should say would be openly useful to me in my professional work in the chair of Poetry and Criticism in the University of Chicago.

For this reason I feel the more free to show his letter here. He wrote:

“. . . My literary hours are spent so entirely in considering the work of other people, that I have scarcely had time to write or collect poems of my own, or to think sufficiently upon any of them with the affection that a father bestows upon his offspring; but, since you ask for my preferences, I will say that, if I have written any pieces of an elevated nature, ‘Ariel’ (on the Shelley centenary), ‘Corda Concordia,’ and the ‘Death of Bryant’ may be named among them. Personally, I have a liking for ‘The Discoverer.’ There is, too, a vein between grave and gay which some have considered peculiarly my own, which is represented by ‘Cousin Lucrece,’ ‘Pan in Wall Street,’ ‘Ilium Fuit,’ ‘The Old Picture-Dealer.’ Frank Sanborn claims that my only absolutely original poem was that on ‘John Brown,’ published during his trial. This procured me the friendship of Emerson and the Brownings. Though I undervalued it at the time—for I was an abject Tennysonian—I wish I had had the sense to have written more like it; especially as Mr. Kipling has informed me that he got hold of it in India in his youth—and, to tell the truth, it now seems to me somewhat akin to the ballads by which he has captured the world. The most subtle lyric which I ever wrote, or shall write, I am sure you will think to be the ‘Stanzas for Music,’ beginning ‘Thou art mine, thou hast given thy word’; and I also like the ‘Nocturne,’ and the ‘Vigil’; and I have a sneaking fondness for ‘Falstaff’s Song.’ (Isn’t it curious that Shakespeare never put even a tavern-catch in the mouth of the fat knight?)

“There! You have betrayed me into saying more of my own poetry than I ever have said before in the course of my life. Don’t think the worse of me for it. ’Tis your own fault.”

Stedman’s frank disclosure of an ostensibly disparaging opinion from Frank Sanborn, “claiming” that the John Brown piece was his “only absolutely original poem,” is evidently the frank disclosure of a man confident in himself of holding an assured position in the republic of letters, from which he could afford

to be magnanimously indifferent to an apparently slighting critical word accompanied with assertion in his favor of absolute originality in at least one instance. Let us look at this exceptional poem of Stedman's. The opening stanza fairly represents the poem as a whole; here it is:

"John Brown in Kansas settled, like a steadfast Yankee farmer,  
 Brave and godly, with four sons, all stalwart men of might.  
 There he spoke aloud for freedom, and the border-strife grew  
 warmer,

Till the Rangers fired his dwelling, in his absence, in the night;  
 And old Brown,  
 Osawatomie Brown,

Came homeward in the morning—to find his house burned down."

Manifestly the merit of such work as that is not the merit of high poetry and not the merit of triumphant rhythm. The most characteristic feature of the stanza is the abrupt audacity of the two lines,

"And Old Brown,  
 Osawatomie Brown,"

which with slight variation is repeated in every stanza throughout the poem. In the last stanza, the poem rises to a prophetic mood which savors of that popular refrain, "John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave, His soul is marching on!" The poem was written while the trial of John Brown was in progress, and while the Virginian spirit was crying out for the hanging of the prisoner:

"But, Virginians, don't do it! for I tell you that the flagon,  
 Filled with blood of Old Brown's offspring, was first poured by  
 Southern hands;  
 And each drop from Old Brown's life-veins, like the red gore of  
 the dragon,



May spring up a vengeful Fury, hissing through your slave-  
worn lands!

And Old Brown,  
Osawatomie Brown,

May trouble you more than ever, when you've nailed his coffin  
down!"

The prophet warning of those lines is couched in a form of expression which lacks something of true lyric directness and force, and altogether I feel obliged to admit that the piece as a whole affects me less with a sense of the writer's being truly borne on by an overmastering passion of sympathy with the subject than it does with a sense of effort on his part to fit a striking incident with suitable commemorative verse. If Stedman could have foreseen how the John Brown tradition was going to establish itself, perhaps his courage of sympathy with his subject would have carried him to a greater, perhaps even to a supreme, lyrical height. A more fervid, I will not say a purer, a finer, moral feeling, would have gone far toward securing a more truly musical poetic expression. It would be curious, by the way, to know whether young Kipling took his cue for writing as he did his ballads of militarism from this piece of Stedman's so early seen by him, and so well remembered for so long.

## VII

IN contrast with such a purposely rough handling as is exemplified in the foregoing ballad of John Brown take now what Stedman, with unconcealed author's fatherly fondness, was sure I should agree with him

in feeling to be his "subtlest" actual or possible lyric performance, the short poem entitled "Stanzas for Music" and noted as "From an Unfinished Drama." The piece is so short that I may show it entire:

"Thou art mine, thou hast given thy word;  
 Close, close in my arms thou art clinging;  
 Alone for my ear thou art singing  
 A song which no stranger hath heard:  
 But afar from me yet, like a bird,  
 Thy soul, in some region unstirred,  
 On its mystical circuit is winging.

"Thou art mine, I have made thee mine own;  
 Henceforth we are mingled forever:  
 But in vain, all in vain, I endeavor—  
 Though round thee my garlands are thrown,  
 And thou yieldest thy lips and thy zone—  
 To master the spell that alone  
 My hold on thy being can sever.

"Thou art mine, thou hast come unto me!  
 But thy soul, when I strive to be near it—  
 The innermost fold of thy spirit—  
 Is as far from my grasp, is as free,  
 As the stars from the mountain-tops be,  
 As the pearl, in the depths of the sea,  
 From the portionless king that would wear it."

Those certainly are musical stanzas—stanzas too, I should say, well fitted for accompaniment of music. For their full effect they even need the music that they invite. Still in themselves they are very musical, simply read aloud or heard only with the imaginative inner ear. "Subtle" are they also, as the author himself seemed to feel them, and as no doubt he meant them. One hates to find oneself wanting in a faculty of discernment that has been flatteringly attributed by a

winningly trustful author. But really I began to fear that those stanzas were even too subtle for me. The subtlety, if subtlety it was and not unconscious obscurity, appeared to reach its climax in the second stanza. Why, I asked myself, should this lover even think of such a thing as trying to master the spell, the one only spell, able to "sever" his "hold" on the fair being he has made so intimately his own? I could manage to understand all the rest; at least I could understand how the lover was conscious that, with all his intimate possession of his beloved, there yet was deep in her personality a reserve of self, a "soul," that neither she could impart, nor he make prize of. But why he should wish to master the dissolving, the severing, spell, which assuredly he would not use if he could master it—that secret eluded me. Unless indeed the idea was that if *he* could master that sinister spell, then no one else could employ it against him, to part him from his beloved. But that would not seem necessarily to follow, and at any rate that subtlety, if such was indeed the subtlety intended, was too subtly expressed.

Stedman's language about the peculiar quality of these stanzas prepared me to look for subtlety in them, and I still was not sure that I had found it. Perhaps, I insistingly said, it might not be questing too wide to wonder whether the true meaning was not that the jealous lover dreamed of a hovering, haunting, hostile spell about him in the air, which might "sever" his "hold" on the "being" of his beloved, and that spell he would "master," not to use it, but to destroy it. In that case, the lover surely was "overexquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evil." I at length de-

cided that the subtlety was not so far to seek as I had been led to imagine. It really was nothing more or less than what Matthew Arnold meant when he so impressively said and sang, "We mortal millions dwell *alone*." The "spell" Stedman spoke of was a spell which prevented the avid lover from taking possession of a certain ultimate reserve of personality in his beloved, which forever baffled his endeavor to seize it. That spell "severed" her from him, and he could in no wise master it. The necessities of rhyme and meter involved the poet's expression in an ambiguity which produced obscurity, misleading me to seek the subtlety where it was not to be found.

Stedman did not mention among his own preferences "The Heart of New England"; but I can give a legend about the birth of that piece in the poet's mind which lends to it a certain interest—at least for those who like to get a glimpse into the mystery of the workings of genius within itself. Mr. Gilder told me once—I now recall the incident after many years, under the correction of his better memory—that Stedman reported to him of himself that he was riding by rail across the State of Connecticut, I believe it was, and, looking through the car-window, he, as it were, involuntarily, uttered to himself the sentiment of the wintry landscape beheld, in the words, "And cold are the snows of New England," and that became the germ of the poem; the poem was built on that as a refrain, a refrain modified according to need from stanza to stanza. As it turned out, the germinal phrase appears in its original spontaneous form only in the closing stanza, where it stands as the last line of the poem, carrying with it there a burden of genuine pathos.



The poem became a little idyll of love and loss; and this is the end of it:

“I gazed upon the stunted pines, the bleak November sky,  
And knew that buried deep with her my heart henceforth would  
lie;  
And waking in the solemn nights my thoughts still thither go  
To Katie, lying in her grave beneath the winter snow;  
And cold are the snows of New England.”

Of the piece as a whole, Mr. Howells, writing editorially in the *Atlantic Monthly*, said when the volume containing it was published: “We do not know a more affecting American ballad than ‘The Heart of New England,’ which is also a symmetrical and finished poem.”

## VIII

To one short poem of Stedman’s a tender, pathetic interest attaches, from the fact that at his request it was sung at the funeral of his wife, and then, a few years after, at his own funeral. “The Undiscovered Country” is the title, placed within quotation-marks to indicate its being borrowed from “Hamlet”:

“Could we but know  
The land that ends our dark, uncertain travel,  
Where lie those happier hills and meadows low—  
Ah, if beyond the spirit’s inmost cavil,  
Aught of that country could we surely know,  
Who would not go?

“Might we but hear  
The hovering angels’ high imagined chorus,  
Or catch, betimes, with wakeful eyes and clear,  
One radiant vista of the realm before us—  
With one rapt moment given to see and hear,  
Ah, who would fear?

" Were we quite sure  
 To find the peerless friend who left us lonely,  
 Or there, by some celestial stream as pure,  
 To gaze in eyes that here were lovelit only—  
 This weary mortal coil, were we quite sure,  
 Who would endure?"

"A more prevailing sadness" is the tone of that hymn. The note of hope, of trust, is absent. A wistful doubt breathes through it. It contrasts sadly herein with Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar." The fact that Stedman desired to have this piece sung as a hymn at his wife's funeral, and at his own, seems to show that it represented his final attitude toward the idea of life beyond death. In face of this pathetic character in the stanzas, one is disinclined to point out minor flaws in the expression achieved by the poet, of his controlling sentiment. That the poem has a certain pensive and appealing beauty is not to be denied.

"If I have written any pieces of an elevated nature," Stedman, with a fine blended modesty and dignity, wrote in that letter of his shown on a page preceding, "'Ariel' may be named among them." As a final selection from among Stedman's poems for particular remark, "Ariel," then, may fitly claim our attention.

"Of an elevated nature," to use Stedman's own restrained, quasi-judicial phrase, this poem certainly is. It shows a becomingly adequate sense on the poet's part of the importance of the subject and of the occasion. It could hardly have borne more distinctly this character, if the admirers of Shelley had formally chosen Stedman the laureate of their bard. It is instinct with an admirably just and delicate feeling for

Shelley's peculiar personal and poetic quality. Indeed, the very title itself, "Ariel," indicates this with felicity. The technical structure of the poem is in good keeping with the classic tradition in form, of which Shelley himself, with all the self-indulging waywardness of his genius, was, both in theory and in practise, ever noticeably regardful. It is composed in stanzas of eight lines each, the last line being an Alexandrine. There are three shorter lines, one of two, one of three, and one of four, iambs; the four other lines being decasyllabic. The rhymes are distributed with a true instinct for musical effect; the poem contrasting favorably in this respect with, for instance, Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis," in which some of the rhymes are so related to one another in place that they are almost completely lost to the ear. The stanza of the "Ariel" seems to be an invention of Stedman's, and, being a good stanza, it reflects credit accordingly on the inventor.

The second stanza hits off the elusive, etherealized quality of Shelley's genius in these striking lines:

"And art thou still what Shelley was erewhile—  
 A feeling born of music's restlessness—  
     A child's swift smile  
 Between its sobs—a wandering mist that rose  
     At dawn—a cloud that hung  
     The Euganean hills among;  
 Thy voice, a wind-harp's strain in some enchanted close?"

In the third stanza occurs the following appreciation of Shelley at his best of wistful feeling for the sorrows of mankind:

"Who gazed as if astray  
 From some uncharted stellar way,  
 With eyes of wonder at our world of grief and wrong."

That Alexandrine is an authentic achievement, in meaning, in music, and in phrase—if it is not rather a pure felicity, an unsought inspiration of genius happily careless of art.

Throughout the poem are inwoven allusions, which the Shelley-lover will recognize, to incidents of Shelley's life and death, to traits of his character, and to memorable productions of his Muse. A touch of satire, well justified by the facts of the case, however uncharacteristic of the complaisance habitual with Stedman, occurs in a noting of the shallow conventional praise of Shelley which has lately become the vogue among affecters of literary taste and culture:

“But now with foolish cry the multitude  
Awards at last the throne,  
And claims thy cloudland for its own  
With voices all untuned to thy melodious mood.”

The stanza next following tells of the joy that the author had, in those years foregone, when he was wont, as he says—addressing Shelley's shade invoked to hear him—to “wreak my youth upon thy song.” The stanza succeeding this has an autobiographic interest not without its pathos:

“Even then, like thee, I vowed to dedicate  
My powers to beauty; ay, but thou didst keep  
The vow, whilst I knew not the afterweight  
That poets weep,  
The burthen under which one needs must bow,  
The rude years envying  
My voice the notes it fain would sing  
For men belike to hear as still they hear thee now.”

That phrase, “the rude years envying,” recalls Milton's touching recognition of the various enviring



conditions of his lot in later life, which, despite his splendid courage, made seem for the moment almost doubtful to him the success of his great attempt in the "Paradise Lost":

—"unless an age too late, or cold  
Climate, or *years*, damp my intended wing  
Depress'd."

The concluding stanza of the poem repeats the author's vain regret over "purposes betrayed," and repeats it, with the emphasis of implied avowal that, for the sake of being able to sing even the least inspired lay of Shelley's, he would fain have "shared" Shelley's "pain."

Altogether the "Ariel" must be pronounced a tribute worthy at once of the poet singing and of the poet sung; it has not the glorious fault of exceeding, as Shelley's "Adonais" exceeded, but it is admirable, it is worthy.

In grateful, reluctant dismissal of the theme, it may, without reserve, summarily be said that, what with his poetic production, his poetic criticism, and his poetic anthologies, Edmund Clarence Stedman, the gentle, the generous, the beloved, succeeded, against great obstacles, in writing himself enduringly into the history of nineteenth-century American literature. Besides this, and perhaps not less than this, he bequeathed to that history a gracious personal tradition of value not easy to overestimate.

JOHN MORLEY AS CRITIC OF  
VOLTAIRE AND DIDEROT



## JOHN MORLEY AS CRITIC OF VOLTAIRE AND DIDEROT

### I

I AM not unaware, and I do not forget, that the distinguished subject of this paper has lately been created viscount. But I conceive that I do him honor by continuing to him here the plain and simple name without title under which he has long been known to lovers of letters, and under which he wrote the works here considered in criticism. John Morley then I call him, to say at the outset that he has a threefold claim to the attention of intelligent men, in being at once an influential statesman, an influential man of letters, and—an atheist, I was about to say, but anti-theist let me say rather, to avoid a natural effect of opprobrium in a word, an effect by no means desired or intended.

Mr. Morley's character as atheist—if I may now use the more familiar term purged of opprobrious effect—Mr. Morley's character as atheist is inextricably blended with his character as man of letters. He has exerted his literary influence to propagate atheistic views. That influence he has brought to bear in two ways: he has been an author and he has been an editor. As editor he conducted the *Fortnightly Review* fifteen years, the *Pall Mall Gazette* three years, and



*Macmillan's Magazine* two years. He also has had editorial charge of the "English Men of Letters" series of books. How an editor could, and how Mr. Morley did, make himself felt in a given direction when fulfilling a trust of the latter sort is sufficiently indicated by the mere reminder that James Anthony Froude was chosen by him to present John Bunyan to the public.

As author Mr. Morley has written essays many enough and long enough to fill eleven handsome volumes in the collective edition of his works in which a few years ago his English publishers introduced him to American readers.

A little earlier than this Mr. Morley had, as it were formally, withdrawn in great part—he could not withdraw wholly—from literature, to devote himself to statesmanship. That transfer of himself from authorship to affairs has naturally, in proportion as he has won commanding success in his changed sphere of exertion, tended rather to increase than to diminish his literary influence. There has been, and there will inevitably continue to be, a carrying over of credit reflected from the statesman to the author.

Of Mr. Morley, however, as statesman, I need say nothing directly, except to mention that during a protracted period of Mr. Gladstone's later political career, he was that great leader's trusted lieutenant, having, indeed, a very large share in the honor and responsibility of those two famous measures of Home Rule for Ireland, the first of which, in the event of parliamentary fortune, drove him with his chief for a considerable time out of power, and the second of which absorbed for so long the attention of the im-

perial legislature. Admirers of Mr. Gladstone, of whom the present writer reckons himself one, will recognize, in the relation thus pointed out as subsisting between these two statesman, a strong presumptive title in the younger to esteem on their part for purity and elevation of moral character. This title you feel to be confirmed rather than invalidated as you study Mr. Morley's literary productions. The noble biography of Gladstone, which Mr. Morley has dedicated to the memory of his friend and his political chief, is so written as to be at once and equally a monument to the subject and to the author. It has seemed to me in the reading of it absolutely unimpeachable in point of judgment, of taste, and of fidelity alike to Gladstone's character and convictions and to the biographer's own—different, and even antagonistic, as, in some important respects, these are well known to be. It can not be improper to add that opportunity enjoyed by the present writer of personal contact with this distinguished man of letters and distinguished statesman has had a decisive effect to strengthen in him an impression already strong of pure and noble moral quality in the subject of the criticism here undertaken.

Mr. Morley, though an atheist, is no mocker. He is emphatically a grave and serious man. He is even too grave and serious. A leaven of humor would improve his intellectual, perhaps too his ethical, quality. But, at any rate, Mr. Morley does not scoff. He may offend you with dogmatism, but he will not offend you with levity. He is as solemn in opposing the Christian faith as the most solemn of Christians could desire. There is left to his reader no room for doubt

that this writer sincerely believes himself to be doing a needed service for mankind in the attempt to overthrow Christianity and even to abolish God. He presents, in fact, a bold contrast to the "philosopher"—we must quote this word when we apply it to Voltaire—who was so impressed with the usefulness of the idea of a Divine Being that he said (I give now, it will be understood, the famous *mot* of Voltaire himself): "If there were no God it would be our duty to create one." Mr. Morley vehemently thinks that the idea of God, with its circle of related ideas, is not only false but morally injurious. No-God is in his view better than God.

But the wisest of my readers will feel surer if they see a statement in Mr. Morley's own words of his position in the sphere of religious thought and belief. This I furnish in the following extract from his long essay "On Compromise," originally, like most of his writings, published in the *Fortnightly Review*. It will be seen that Mr. Morley's confession is sufficiently sweeping and positive. There is no need of mistaking *his* views. He says:

"Those who agree with the present writer, for example, are not skeptics. They positively, absolutely, and without reserve reject as false the whole system of objective propositions [of course, the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, among these] which make up the popular belief of the day in one and all of its theological expressions. They look upon that system as mischievous in its consequences."

Obviously, to consider here this distinguished writer chiefly in his character of atheist and advocate of atheism will be doing him no injustice. The atheistic motive and interest are fundamental and controlling

in his literary work. When I say this I mean to include in the idea of atheism the whole group of positivist ideas, especially moral and social ideas, which the idea of atheism, as held in these Christian times and climes, seems naturally to involve.

Let me repeat I do not use the word "atheist" in the present application as an epithet of opprobrium. I use it without color, without feeling, simply as an epithet of description. Mr. Morley is so convincingly and so confidently an atheist that of his being such he makes no secret whatever. Nay, he is so earnestly an atheist that he aggressively teaches and preaches atheism on every occasion which seems to him suitable. The present tense in which I say this is liable to be misunderstood. When Mr. Morley turned from literature to statesmanship, he ceased to put forward prominently his antitheistic views. But he has never receded from them. He is a man of conviction, he is a man of conscience, and he is a man of courage. His books continue to teach the antitheism as to which their author is now discreetly silent. This warrants the present tense in which I express myself above.

It has been by some zealous theists speculatively doubted whether a really sincere and honest, intelligent atheist is possible. Well, in face of what the psalmist declares, "The *fool* hath said in his heart, 'No God'" it certainly would be unwarrantable in the Christian believer to attribute the highest human intelligence to the denier of the being of a God; there should seem to be always remaining in every such denier some defect of intelligence worthy even to be characterized as folly. But relatively, at least, and



apart from the article of atheism in his creed, Mr. Morley is undoubtedly a man of extraordinary intelligence; and it would take a truly obstinate spirit of skepticism to read Mr. Morley's books and doubt the perfect sincerity of his atheism. The interior fact, however, need here be no concern of ours; the exterior fact is that, at least in those books of his here criticized, Mr. Morley is an open and even an eager propagandist of atheistic views.

## II

WITH every appeasing and conciliatory explanation supplied, the epithet "atheist" will yet, to many readers, seem so unalterably injurious to its object that I feel like further placating such in advance toward Mr. Morley (and perhaps toward myself!) by quoting at once a passage from him in which his atheistic character, if not quite redeemed to popular acceptance, will at least appear at its most seductive and best. In the passage to be shown, Mr. Morley does what he can toward replacing the gospel of Christianity with a gospel of atheism. There could hardly be produced from the author's works any expression that would present him in a more engaging light to the average reader. Mr. Morley says (I quote from his "Voltaire," p. 293):

"It is monstrous to suppose that because a man does not accept your synthesis, he is therefore a being without a positive creed or a coherent body of belief capable of guiding and inspiring conduct. There are new solutions for him, if the old are fallen dumb. If he no longer believes death to be a stroke

from the sword of God's justice, but the leaden footfall of an inflexible law of matter, the humility of his awe is deepened, and the tenderness of his pity made holier that creatures who can love so much should have their days so shut round with a wall of darkness. The purifying anguish of remorse will be stronger, not weaker, when he has trained himself to look upon every wrong in thought, every duty omitted from act, each infringement of the inner spiritual law which humanity is constantly perfecting for its own guidance and advantage, less as a breach of the decrees of an unseen tribunal than as an ungrateful infection, weakening and corrupting the future of his brothers. And he will be less effectually raised from inmost prostration of soul by a doubtful subjective reconciliation, so meanly comfortable to his own individuality, than by hearing full in the ear the sound of the cry of humanity craving sleepless succor from her children. That swelling consciousness of height and freedom with which the old legends of an omnipotent divine majesty fill the breast may still remain; for how shall the universe ever cease to be a sovereign wonder of overwhelming power and superhuman fixedness of law? And a man will be already in no mean paradise if at the hour of sunset a good hope can fall upon him like harmonies of music, that the earth shall still be fair, and the happiness of every feeling creature still receive a constant augmentation, and each good cause yet find worthy defenders, when the memory of his own poor name and personality has long been blotted out of the brief recollection of men forever."

Certainly there is a tone of high thought and of generous feeling audible in such writing as that. A true touch of pathos, too, there is in it.

Sincerely acknowledging so much, let us rally ourselves from the mood of instinctive sympathetic surprise and admiration, to consider somewhat seriously how large a measure of soundness may, on fair examination, be found in the thought of the passage. I need not be dogmatic. I will simply raise a few questions on the points successively involved in Mr. Mor-

ley's remarks. Critical questions they will be, and by no means either impertinent here or digressive, since they concern Mr. Morley's character and competence as a thinker, and his soundness and trustworthiness in his quality of eulogist of Voltaire.

The first question is this: Is it exactly "awe" that would naturally be inspired by a "leaden footfall," felt to be approaching, of "inflexible law," a law of "matter," to crush the soul into instant annihilation? Would it not rather be either armed apathy or else gross horror of abject despair?

Another question is whether, under such circumstances, there would be any place left for the distinctively Christian grace of "humility"? Stoical stolidity, instead of gracious humility, would, I should say, be the natural attitude of the noblest minds in prospect of imminent annihilation to be experienced under the insensate tread of resistless material law.

"Pity," accentuated with unconscious self-pity, might well, I should say, be made deeper, as more hopeless, in such prospect; but exactly how the "tenderness" of it should be made "holier," it is not easy to see. Again, granted that the "anguish of remorse"—"remorse," be it observed, not repentance, "remorse," too, without the assuagement and revival due to forgiveness bestowed and accepted—granted, I say, that pain of sorrow like this, first, would be experienced, and, second, would have something "purifying" in it, still, how is it clear that to take away the sense of sin as against a gracious and holy Supreme Being offended and grieved, would not only not weaken, but instead actually strengthen, the remorseful emotion? Why would not the remorseful emotion

be the more poignant, the more "purifying," rather than less, if excited by a double instead of a single cause; namely, by the consciousness of wrong done to a benignant Heavenly Father, concurring with the consciousness of wrong done to a suffering fellowship of human "brothers"? The two sentiments, the filial and the fraternal, seem to me kindred enough to go naturally and kindly together. I do not see why they should not support and strengthen each other.

As matter of historical fact would Mr. Morley undertake to produce out of the autobiographical disclosures of any atheist a cry of anguish in sorrow over fault committed more self-evidently wrung from the heart of sincerity and more self-evidently forced out for the ears of forty generations by a truly elemental experience within the soul of the subject, than is, for example, the fifty-first psalm of David? But the thought of God aggrieved is sovereign in that psalm. That thought indeed drowned out in David's soul the thought of the irreparable wrong which he had done to brother man; and this, although, as the preface to the psalm expressly informs us, the psalm was written in sequel to the memorable visit to David of the sternly-accusing prophet Nathan, whose immortal parable of the "one little ewe lamb" with its point-blank application to the guilty monarch, "Thou art the man," had dealt exclusively with the shameful outrage wreaked on a human brother. Self-convicted as he was, and self-sentenced to death, "because he had no pity," David yet experienced his most poignant pang as having offended God—"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." Does Mr. Morley really think that David then sorrowed toward man the less because toward



God he sorrowed more? Nay, but David's sorrow toward God was, as it were, only the measure of his sorrow toward his fellow man. Had he not first sorrowed toward his fellow man he could not have sorrowed toward God at all. David's deed was a sin chiefly because it was a crime.

Still again: What hinders that the soul "raised from inmost prostration" by the ineffable consciousness of peace restored with God should then further be raised and sustained by also hearing "humanity" appealing pathetically for succor? That appealing cry, what human soul ever more sensitively heard than did the great apostle to the Gentiles? And yet Paul it was who most earnestly of all preached the gospel of reconciliation. "Meanly comfortable"! Was that magnanimously insinuated by Mr. Morley? Does meanness naturally associate itself in his mind, or in any generous man's mind, with the idea of a doctrine taught as the central thing in life by a man like Paul? I appeal to Mr. Morley against Mr. Morley here. For Mr. Morley is himself instinctively too noble not to recognize, and to admire, the nobleness of Paul. He couples Paul with Jesus in a striking ascription to both of the very highest—for him, the very highest—praise. Speaking of a certain man—of what man, the reader would never guess; I shall name him presently—Mr. Morley says:

"With all his enthusiasm for things noble and lofty, generous and compassionate, he [the man presently to be named] missed the peculiar emotion of holiness, the soul and life alike of the words of Christ and St. Paul. . . . That spirit of holiness which poured itself round the lives and words of the two founders, the great master and the great apostle."

Remarkable sympathetic appreciation, that, of the innermost quality in Paul, to come from the pen of an atheist! Mr. Morley, in spite of himself, has not lived under Christian conditions in vain. Still, let us neither wonder nor triumph unwisely. Mr. Morley would probably attribute "holiness," in much the same kind and degree, to Epictetus or to Marcus Aurelius.

The man of whom Mr. Morley was speaking, when the idea of holiness as an attribute of character occurred to his mind, was—who would have conjectured it?—Voltaire.

Voltaire and "holiness"! What a conjunction in thought! Hardly would Mr. Morley have surprised one more had he boldly *ascribed* "holiness" to Voltaire than he does by softly denying it to him. The true wonder is that the notion of "holiness" should have sprung up at all to Mr. Morley in such a connection of thought. But I go back to resume my questions on the passage quoted from Mr. Morley.

Once more then: Is it not truly strange—strange almost to the point of being incredible—that Mr. Morley, or that any one, should impose upon himself to believe that he considers the conception of the universe—of the universe in itself alone—to be as lifting and expanding to the soul as is that same conception of the universe together with, also, the conception of a Being greater than the universe, and sufficiently greater to be able to will the universe into existence? To me, the Christian idea of God, whether a true idea or a false, seems, *self-evidently*—let it be regarded simply as a conception of the imaginative mind—to be the largest, the sublimest, the most expanding, and the most exalting, idea of which human nature is

capable. And suppose the universe a creation. It is no less the universe for being that, and a no less universe. Now is not a creator greater than his creation?

Finally, of Mr. Morley's hypothetical "good hope"—what shall I say? Is it not pathetic? But the pathos of it is, to the thoughtful reader, somewhat relieved by the unavoidable suspicion engendered that Mr. Morley here is at least as much fanciful as he is sincerely sentimental. "That the earth shall still be fair"! And yet elsewhere Mr. Morley does not scruple to speak—not irreverently indeed, or not with conscious irreverence, for there is, remember, no God in his "synthesis" as to whom the fault of irreverence could be committed (a ghastly lack, by the way, both theoretical and practical, in the atheistic scheme, is the lack of place for the emotion of reverence)—of the "scanty successes" of the universe conceived as a creation.

On the whole, Mr. Morley's *carmen triumphale*, inspired by the gospel of atheism as he understands it, is less successful than George Eliot's "O may I join the choir invisible!"

And any one of Paul's exultant doxologies seems to me considerably better than either.

My readers may some of them be saying with themselves, Mr. Morley's elevation of thought, as displayed in the passage presented and criticized, is so evidently a derivation, conscious or unconscious on his own part, from Christianity that to stand forth before the world in the character of literary champion for the anti-christian cause becomes him very ill. But we should bear in mind, first, that from Mr. Morley's own point of view, he, as a son of "humanity," has a right to

whatever gains of moral or intellectual culture humanity has achieved for itself; and, second, that among these gains is to be reckoned everything in Christianity that may be found truly good. From his own point of view, therefore, he is as completely justified in destroying the bad that Christianity brings as he is in preserving the good; and he may fairly, too, use the good, in the very act, and for the very purpose, of destroying the bad. The Christian doctrine of God is bad, according to Mr. Morley; from the elevated standing-ground in thought and in feeling to which Christianity itself may have raised him, he is subjectively quite right in exerting, as thus to the greater advantage he may, his strength to cast down and shatter the Christian idea of God. To me, of course, it appears certain that the atheist, especially be he of Mr. Morley's exalted type, thus commits a peculiarly fatal mistake. It is to me somewhat as if a man, scaling a precipitous cliff, should, before securing any other place where he might safely stand to hold the height achieved, spurn from under his feet the ladder by which he had so far climbed.

### III

THE most important part of Mr. Morley's literary production consists of a series of essays or monographs on eighteenth-century French authors, including notably his volumes on Voltaire and on Diderot. These essays or monographs are in effect, if not also in motive, fully as much antichristian polemics as they are critical studies in biography and literature. This



is perhaps preeminently the case with the two-volumed essay on Diderot.

I do not say this in condemnation, but simply in description. To conduct a biographical or a literary study with an ulterior argumentative aim may be perfectly proper and fair. One need only exercise the requisite caution—and the caution requisite is very great—not to let the aim mislead the study.

This requisite measure of caution Mr. Morley, in treating especially Voltaire and Diderot, has, I think, not exercised; and to show that such is the case is the chief object of the present paper.

I must not thus frankly disclose an object on my part unfavorable to Mr. Morley in his "Voltaire" and his "Diderot," without acknowledgment accompanying as ample as I can candidly make it of the merits that even here are undoubtedly his. Mr. Morley is a high-minded, conscientious, painstaking writer. He thinks, and he stimulates thought. You feel that he deals frankly with you, and you can not but respect him accordingly. There are occasional felicities of scholarlike and cultivated diction and phrase which gratify your taste, and sometimes even a touch of true poetry surprises you into delight as you read.

But, despite all such concessions justly his due, a certain difficulty in accomplishing my object confronts me, created by the nature of the style in which Mr. Morley expresses himself. That style, with whatever other merits it may fairly be credited, certainly has not the merit of consummate lucidity. On the contrary, it is often confusingly obscure, puzzlingly ambiguous. It is not a careless style, but it is not wisely careful. It is full, but it is too full, of thought.

There has been labor, and the labor somehow seems still to continue, everywhere. A single illustration, by no means the most striking adducible, shall suffice to show what I mean. Mr. Morley is speaking of Voltaire (p. 72):

“From this [exactly what “this” here is, I confess myself unable, after some attentive study of the context, to tell] there flowed that other vehement current in his soul, of energetic hatred toward the black clouds of prejudice, of mean self-love, of sinister preference of class or order, of indolence, obstinacy, wanton fancy, and all the other unhappy leanings of human nature, and vexed and fatal conjunctures of circumstance which interpose between humanity and the beneficent sunbeams of its own intelligence, that central light of the universe.”

There, Mr. Morley's reader finds “flowing” from some fountain, uncertain what, another “current,” “other” than what is again uncertain, but at all events a current of “hatred”; it is hatred toward sundry “black clouds”: namely, clouds of “prejudice,” clouds of “self-love,” clouds of “preference of class or order,” clouds of “indolence,” clouds of “obstinacy,” clouds of “wanton fancy,” and clouds of “all the other unhappy leanings of human nature,” and clouds of “vexed and fatal conjunctures of circumstance”; which clouds many, and assuredly diverse, “interpose” between “humanity,” on the one hand, and “sunbeams” proceeding from “its own intelligence,” on the other, this same “intelligence” being, by way of finish to the sentence and to the sustained rhetorical figure, declared to be the “central light of the universe.”

But now, to let pass what here is not determinable in meaning, also to let pass what to some may seem not perfectly felicitous in expression, consider for a

moment the intelligible thought conveyed. Voltaire is represented as vehemently hating "mean self-love." The literary man, that is to say, who, though rich (Voltaire's annual income at his death was found equivalent to about two hundred thousand dollars, present value), wrangled through a long correspondence, in a manner described by Mr. Morley himself (p. 110) as "insolent, undignified, low-minded, and untruthful," about what? Why, about some firewood which he insisted that the gentleman with whom he quarreled had *given* to him, and which he wished to wriggle dishonestly out of paying for—that man effusively represented to be a vehement hater of "mean self-love"!

Mr. Morley constantly glozes the faults of his heroes, the adversaries of Christ. He does not conceal their faults; he desires to be fair, and he tells them. He not only tells them, but often he has some wholesome, honest words of righteous blame. And then he proceeds to gloze them. This may be said to be his almost invariable method. It is like an established formula of procedure with him. In the case last referred to, that of Voltaire's conduct in the matter of the firewood, after using the four condemnatory adjectives already quoted, Mr. Morley adds:

"The case happily stands alone in his biography."

Not in any important sense "alone." In two specifications Mr. Morley himself tells us (p. 209):

"While Voltaire constantly declared that he could never forget the outrages which the king of Prussia [Frederick the Great] had inflicted on him, neither did he forget to draw his pension from the king of Prussia."

“Voltaire, though a man of solid wealth, complained shrilly because it [his pension] was irregularly paid at the very time when he knew that Frederick was so short of money that he was driven to melt his plate.”—Morley’s “Diderot,” p. 297.

Poverty-stricken Rousseau, on the contrary, declined the offer of a pension from Frederick, on the very good ground that that sovereign was really unable to afford it.

Yet again, Mr. Morley (p. 206) relates that in a certain considerable business transaction of Voltaire’s with a Jew:

“He [Voltaire] had interpolated matter to his own advantage in a document already signed by his adversary, thus making the Jew to have signed what he had signed not; and, second, that when very hard pushed he [Voltaire] would not swerve from a false oath, *any more than his great enemy, the Apostle Peter, had done.*”

And this same Voltaire, forsooth, had a “vehement current in his soul of energetic hatred toward the black clouds” of “mean self-love”! The gratuitous fling at Peter as precedent and parallel to Voltaire for perjury, conveyed in the words which I italicize in the foregoing, may be taken as characteristic less, I trust, of the personal spirit than of the controversial method of Mr. Morley. The difference in the two perjuries is, that what was solitary and utterly out of character for Peter, was perfectly in character and of the nature of habit, for Voltaire. Further, Voltaire perjured himself deliberately, and for a sordid purpose of swindling; whereas Peter, surprised by sudden temptation, forswore himself to save his own life.

Besides, Peter almost instantly, with bitter tears, repented of his sin; if Voltaire repented of his perjury, Mr. Morley does not record the fact.



## IV

BUT "mean self-love" is not all that, according to Mr. Morley, this generous hater hated. He hated also "sinister preference of class or order." And yet Mr. Morley himself says (p. 140) of Voltaire, already in the full maturity of his manhood, "He was now essentially aristocratic and courtly in his predilections"; again (p. 338), "He was to the last a man of quality."

Yet again, with all the strength implied in Mr. Morley's strong figure, Voltaire, according to his critical English biographer, hated the "black clouds" of "wanton fancy." The author of "Pucelle," that is to say, hated, vehemently hated, energetically hated, "wanton fancy"! (The "Pucelle," as, happily, I may need to explain to some, is a burlesque heroic poem on Joan d'Arc, in which Voltaire befouls the noble and beautiful legend of that woman with fictions of "wanton fancy," gross beyond the imagining of one who has never happened to bring his nose within reach of the reek of it.)

Mr. Morley tires of telling in detail all the things that Voltaire nobly "hated," and he masses them in one sufficiently comprehensive expression. Besides hating the various things specifically mentioned, Voltaire hated, broadly and in general, "all the other unhappy leanings of human nature." Let us see.

I gather out of Mr. Morley's own pages a few illustrative notes that may throw light on this critic's praise of Voltaire for his universal virtuous hatred. Mr. Morley calls him (p. 65) "the greatest mocker that ever lived." He says (p. 102): "Vanity was one

of the most strongly marked of Voltaire's traits." This, by the way, is said in the course of the glowing applied to Voltaire's adulterous "connections" with the Marquise du Châtelet: "To this side of him [namely, "vanity"] relations with a woman of quality, who adored his genius, were no doubt extremely gratifying." Gratifying, "extremely gratifying," that is to say, to a certain "side" of—whom? Why, of a gentleman in whose soul "flowed" a "vehement current of energetic hatred toward the black clouds of sinister preference of class or order"! Mr. Morley speaks (p. 100) of the "damnable iteration of petty quarrel and fretting complaint which fills such a space in his [Voltaire's] correspondence." Mr. Morley says (p. 109): "His [Voltaire's] fluency of invective and complaint . . . was simply boundless when any obscure scribbler earned a guinea by a calumny upon him." Mr. Morley represents (p. 203) Voltaire to have been "excitable as a demon." Mr. Morley relates (pp. 203, 204) how, on a certain occasion, "the furious poet and philosopher [Voltaire] rushed up to his visitor [a bookseller who "*injudiciously* came either to pay his respects or to demand some trivial arrears of money"—italics mine] and inflicted a stinging box on his ears." Mr. Morley says (p. 204): "Voltaire's account [of still another matter respecting himself], witty and diverting as it is, is not free from many misrepresentations, and some tolerably deliberate lies." Mr. Morley uses (p. 198) the pregnant and suggestive expression, "even Voltaire's spleen." Mr. Morley says (p. 160): "He [Voltaire] sought to catch some crumb of praise by fawningly asking of the vilest of men [Louis XV.], 'Trajan, est-il content?'" Mr.

Morley says (p. 337): "We find him [Voltaire] playing the equivocal part of being all things to all men. . . . Voltaire's lively complaisance to all sorts of unworthy people is something worse than unedifying." Mr. Morley says (p. 338): "Voltaire not only disclaimed works of which it was notorious that he was the author, but insisted that his friends should impute them to this or that dead name."

Of the foregoing very inadequate collection of notes furnished by Mr. Morley himself for the illustration of Voltaire's character, let us now briefly take the sum and make the instructive comparison naturally suggested of our author with himself.

For the sake of clearer true effect, I condense, so far as possible, each different specification of Mr. Morley's into a single equivalent word. The reader will be able at his leisure to look back and consider how far the present critic is justified in the series of condensations thus made.

Voltaire, then, as appears from Mr. Morley, was vain, he mocked, he deceived, he lied, he forged, he swindled, he perjured himself, he fawned, he flattered, he haggled, he begged, he scolded, he whined, he wrangled, he brawled, he stormed, he struck, he wrote ribaldry, he practised adultery; and yet, according to Mr. Morley, this vain man, this mocker, this deceiver, this liar, forger, swindler, perjurer, fawner, flatterer, haggler, sponge, scold, whiner, wrangler, perjurer, stormer, striker, ribald, adulterer, had in his soul a vehement current of energetic hatred toward the black clouds of "all the unhappy leanings of human nature"—quite "all" of them!

I write here from no unkindness to the memory of

poor Voltaire. He had his merits, and I have no wish to disparage them. But it is not now Voltaire that is on trial. It is Mr. John Morley as critic of Voltaire. What I submit to all candid readers is the following postulate as to Mr. Morley's eulogy of Voltaire in the sentence just criticized, namely: Voltaire's eulogist said, in that sentence, good things of his hero *without sufficiently considering whether or not the things that he said were true.*

I now generalize this judgment and say broadly of Mr. Morley's two monographs as wholes that, from the beginning to the end, they are characterized by the same inconsiderateness of assertion as was found illustrated in the sentence (about "hatred toward" various "black clouds") already put by way of example under criticism.

## V

I AM well aware of the seriousness of the charge that I thus make. The charge amounts to nothing less than the denial of high critical value to Mr. Morley's work in the "Voltaire" and the "Diderot." This denial I do in terms make. Mr. Morley's essays are untrustworthy treatments of their subjects. This I allege not because I believe, though I do believe, his main argumentative contention against Christianity to be a mistake in historical and philosophical criticism. Such a central mistake a writer might conceivably commit, and yet keep to truth and soundness and consistency in the details of his writing. So to have done would leave one's work—if it were, for instance, a work in the kind of Mr. Morley's two monographs—



substantially just and good as biography and criticism, while as argumentative polemic perhaps remaining, in the view of everybody save the author himself, inconclusive and void. In the case, however, of Mr. Morley discussing Voltaire and Diderot, the central mistake, or, more strictly perhaps, the motive created by the central mistake, seems to have injuriously affected everything. The antichristian purpose, earnest no doubt on Mr. Morley's part, but too eager, has insidiously bribed, not his love of truth let us say, but his power to see the truth. This is conjectural, of course, as to the psychology of the matter, and it may be wrong. I by no means insist upon it. The fact, and not my own conjectural account of the fact, is the thing that is pertinent. And the fact, I repeat, is that Mr. Morley, as critic of Voltaire and of Diderot at least, is not to be trusted, and this for the reason that he makes critical statements *without sufficiently considering whether the statements that he makes are true.*

## VI

I HAVE already shown this in one representative example, and I proceed to show it in what I may take to be a sufficient number of others.

First, however, let us make somewhat more sure of that which has already been accomplished.

Some alert and fair-minded readers may be asking within their own minds: Has not our present critic simply been putting to critical torture a single unfortunate sentence of his author's—an exceptional inadvertence of haste on his part—and been from that wit-

ness wringing a testimony which the general tenor of Mr. Morley's book would contradict? A righteous doubt in Mr. Morley's favor, to which we shall do well to give its just weight.

Elsewhere, then, and otherwise than in the one ill-considered sentence here selected for examination, has Mr. Morley written in praise of Voltaire things as irconcilable, as are the things said in that sentence, with what Mr. Morley himself has been obliged to admit was Voltaire's true character? My readers shall see.

Mr. Morley says (p. 221):

"There was not a man then alive . . . who was, on the whole, in spite of constitutional infirmities and words which were far worse than his deeds, more ardent and persevering [than Voltaire] in its practise" [that is, in the practise of the "generous humanity" of the Sermon on the Mount].

Is adultery, then, is lying, is wrangling—I confine myself to what may be considered either habitual or at least very frequent practises with Voltaire—are these things and things such as these included by Mr. Morley in the "generous humanity" of the Sermon on the Mount? Or is forgery, for example—forgery perpetrated by a rich man for the purpose of swindling—to be reckoned among "constitutional infirmities"? Those forged words of Voltaire's, those at least, are not to be made light of as being forsooth "far worse than his deeds." They were his deeds. So were the words in which he told his lies. So were the words in which he wrote his "Pucelle." So were the words in which he mocked at things divine. In fact, Voltaire did almost all his deeds in words, and those words still live and are trumpet-tongued to tell what Voltaire was. I think they never told anybody till they told

Mr. Morley, that Voltaire was as "ardent and persevering" in living up to the "generous humanity" of the Sermon on the Mount as was any man of his time. John Howard, the philanthropist, was one of the men "then alive."

The proportionally very small measure of truth in that highly uncritical judgment of Mr. Morley's is, that Voltaire did ardently and perseveringly certain generous things—notably, vindicate the cause of the oppressed and persecuted Calas family. Let these things be, without grudging, set down to Voltaire's credit. But surely it is not such things alone—nay, it is not such things chiefly—that constitute the "generous humanity" of the Sermon on the Mount.

Mr. Morley, being about thus virtually (p. 221) to pronounce Voltaire equal in goodness to the best among his contemporaries, boldly (p. 147) calls him also, without qualification, the "greatest man of his time." Now it might, in fact, happen that the far from ideal character that, out of Mr. Morley's own pages, Voltaire has already been shown to have been; a man to whom, further, Mr. Morley attributes (p. 271) "insufficient depth of nature"; a man of whom at Berlin, Mr. Morley testifies (p. 195) that he "took a childish delight in his gold key and his star"; a man of whom Mr. Morley (p. 341) relates that "the gorgeous ceremony with which in his quality of lord he commemorated its opening [that is, the opening of a chapel on his estate, rebuilt by the mocking proprietor himself] made everybody laugh, not excepting the chief performer, for he actually took the opportunity of lifting up his voice in the new temple and preaching a sermon against theft"; a man of whom

Mr. Morley further relates (p. 341) that, in sequel to the foregoing, he "tried to make a nominal peace with the Church by confessing, and participating in the solemnity of an Easter communion"; a man of whom, yet once more, Mr. Morley (p. 342) relates that subsequently to the things foregoing, he, Voltaire, in order to accomplish the last mockery possible, "was at once [on occasion apparently of some warning against him issued by the bishop to the curé] seized with a [pretended] fever, and summoned the priest to administer ghostly comfort," in consequence of which "he did duly receive the viaticum," declaring that "if any indiscretion prejudicial to the religion of the State should have escaped him, he seeks forgiveness from God and the State"; a man of whom Mr. Morley has something additional in the same line of conduct to relate, which he simply calls "one other curious piece of sportiveness," but which we need not trouble ourselves now to understand (it is interesting, however, to remember that these "curious pieces of sportiveness" were the pranks of a youngster of only about seventy-five years of age)—it might, I say, in fact happen that a man like this was, notwithstanding all, what Mr. Morley calls Voltaire, "the greatest man of his time." The men of Voltaire's time might be to that degree small. Still one recalls that Frederick the Great lived then, Peter the Great, Marlborough, Washington, Franklin, Newton, Chatham, Burke, Locke, Hume (of whom, in his essay on Turgot, Mr. Morley himself says, "the greatest of the whole band of innovators," Voltaire, of course, being one), Pope, Lessing—we might almost include Goethe, who was twenty-nine years old, and had written "Werther"



and "Goetz" when Voltaire died—to say nothing of Turgot, Montesquieu, Buffon, Diderot, among Voltaire's own countrymen—one recalls these names coeval with Voltaire, and one wonders whether it was not uncritical confidence or uncritical enthusiasm on his part that betrayed Mr. Morley into being altogether so clear and decisive on the point of Voltaire's preeminence in greatness over all the other men of his time.

But Mr. Morley himself supplies the means of checking Mr. Morley at this point. He quotes approvingly (p. 73) Voltaire pronouncing him "right" who to the question, Who was the greatest man?—that is, of all history—had "answered that it was undoubtedly Isaac Newton." Nor is this all. Mr. Morley, in the preliminary chapter to his volumes (p. 17), says: "To have really contributed in the humblest degree, for instance, to a peace between Prussia and her enemies in 1759 would have been an immeasurably greater performance for mankind than any given book which Voltaire could have written." This, of course, is not said by Mr. Morley to disparage Voltaire's ability as a man of letters in comparison with other men of letters. It is said in the course of a passage devoted to showing how much higher a sphere the sphere of action is than the sphere of literature. Mr. Morley here was vindicating Voltaire against the disparagement of those who had treated with contempt his anxiety, never gratified, to play diplomatist. That anxiety, Mr. Morley thinks, did Voltaire credit. (This is Mr. Morley estimating diplomacy, when it seems to him desirable to defend Voltaire for seeking to be a diplomatist. When it becomes his object to approve Voltaire sneering at diplomacy, Mr. Morley [pp. 314,

315] will use this different language: "Diplomacy and its complex subterranean processes, which have occupied so extremely disproportionate a place in written history, and which are in acted history responsible for so much evil, were in the same way informally relegated [by Voltaire] to the region of inhuman occupations.") The very "humblest" contribution to the bringing about of a certain peace would have been an "immeasurably" greater achievement than any book that Voltaire could have written. These superlative words, are they considerate? Are they critical? "In the humblest degree"? "Immeasurably greater"? But, at all events, this comes out clear—namely, that Mr. Morley ranks the vocation of letters far—very far, perhaps even "immeasurably" far—below the vocation of statesmanship, government, action. Now how does Frederick the Great stand comparatively, in Mr. Morley's esteem, as one among those who have exerted themselves in that sphere of active affairs which is so much above Voltaire's sphere of letters? The following sentence will show. Mr. Morley (p. 187) says:

"Such an achievement as the restoration of the germs of order and prosperity, which Frederick so rapidly brought about after the appalling ruin that seven years of disastrous war had effected, is unmatched in the history of human government."

It appears, then, that; according to Mr. Morley, Frederick achieved the very highest in a sphere of things far higher than Voltaire's, while yet Voltaire was a greater man than Frederick. Was this perhaps because though Voltaire was actually a mere man of letters, he was yet potentially capable of greater things than to be a man of letters? No, for Mr. Morley (p. 117) tells us that "if ever man was called not to

[various other things] but to literature . . . that man was Voltaire." To point the comparative inferiority of "literature" still more sharply, Mr. Morley (pp. 117, 118) (perhaps factitiously) *distinguishes* "literature" as being "essentially an art of form," "from those exercises of intellectual energy" which produce work like that of "Shakespeare and Molière, Shelley and Hugo." Voltaire was thus essentially, not fortuitously, a mere man of letters, and letters are so far below diplomacy, for example, that the "humblest" success in the latter line, at least if it happened to be won in the bringing about of a certain peace, would be an "immeasurably" greater achievement on Voltaire's part than the greatest achievement possible to him with his pen—all this, and yet Voltaire, the mere man of letters, as distinguished from the creative man of genius, a greater man than the accomplisher of the greatest feat in rulership ever yet accomplished in the history of the world!

To make the wondering confusion of his reader complete, Mr. Morley (p. 188) strongly says:

"I do not know of any period of corresponding length that can produce such a group of active, wise, and truly positive statesmen as existed in Europe between 1760 and 1780 [Voltaire's time]. Besides Frederick, we have Turgot in France, Pombal in Portugal, Charles III. and D'Aranda in Spain."

So many men so great—so great in a sphere so much greater than that of Voltaire—all flourishing contemporaneously with him, and Voltaire "the greatest man of his time"!

## VII

SUCH contradictions as the foregoing are not properly to be considered the mere casual fruit of the spirit of hyperbole in expression. This spirit is, indeed, itself anything but critical. There is perhaps hardly a better superficial test to be found of the comparing, the judging, the critical, temper and capacity, in any given writer's case, than to observe carefully how frequently, and how, he uses superlative and absolute expressions. This test Mr. Morley's writing in "Voltaire" would prove ill able to bear.

My space runs rapidly away or I should like to collect here, as it would be easy to do, a demonstrative number of instances in which Mr. Morley risks himself unwisely in very uncritical judgments of the absolute or the superlative sort. But, as I have intimated, Mr. Morley's contradictions of himself are not to be explained simply by being attributed to an uncritical habit of exaggeration on his part. He contradicts himself often, not merely in terms of expression, but in substance of thought. This might readily be shown in many other examples, but meantime the extraordinary distraction of Mr. Morley's various sentences on Voltaire is as yet far from being fully presented.

Mr. Morley, as I have said, does not dissemble the faults of his heroes. He makes it plain enough that Voltaire was one of the very falsest of men. The peculiarity of the case with Mr. Morley is that his conscientious candor in letting us know this for instance about Voltaire, does not prevent his telling us



also (p. 204) that Voltaire was "fundamentally a man of exceptional truth"! "Exceptional," indeed, I should hope that Voltaire's style of "truth" was! Voltaire lied well-nigh as multitudinously as any man ever did, and his critical biographer uses his omniscience to find out for us that Voltaire was, notwithstanding, "fundamentally" not merely a man of truth, but a man of "exceptional truth." Mr. Morley, after severely, and no doubt sincerely, blaming Voltaire's lying "complaisance with all sorts of unworthy people," reassures us about the matter by adding that "there was nothing false about these purring pleasantries." If he tells us that Voltaire was "the greatest mocker that ever lived," he sets us to wondering with one of his unqualified strong assertions to the effect that Voltaire was likewise "always serious in meaning."

I am pressing Mr. Morley hard? Perhaps. But I am not pressing him unfairly. Nor is it without fruitful practical reason that I thus press him.

Mr. Morley, though not a popular, is an influential, writer. He is forming the opinions of many who are forming the opinions of the public. It is not a matter of small moment what the quality is of the power that he is thus exerting.

His elaborate monograph on Voltaire is neither more nor less than a bold attempt made at what seems a very late hour to rehabilitate that Frenchman in the admiration—nay, even to instate him in the veneration—of mankind. How successful the attempt has been in certain quarters is, I think, shown by a recent very remarkable incidental observation dropped from the pen of Mr. Lowell. Mr. Lowell, in his brilliant essay on the poet Gray, speaking in general a good

word for the much-disparaged eighteenth century, holds this language:

*"The eighteenth century gave us Voltaire, who, if he used ridicule too often for the satisfaction of personal spite, employed it also for sixty years in the service of truth and justice, and to him more than to any other one man we owe it that we can now think and speak as we choose."*

What I print in italics is a most extraordinary assertion, an assertion not verifiable, I think; indeed an assertion, as I believe, in the liveliest possible antithesis to the truth. This I would cheerfully undertake to show. But for the present I quote Mr. Lowell's remark simply for the purpose of pointing sharply the set of tendency fast establishing itself, if not already established, toward the undue estimation of Voltaire. For that set of tendency, as mischievous as it is misleading, John Morley is no doubt more responsible than any other English-speaking man. His volume on Voltaire is one continuous reasoned claim on its subject's behalf to the gratitude and homage of his fellow men.

Now, the great French writer's actual merit for his work, I have no disposition to disparage; and neither have I any disposition to disparage the brilliancy or the beneficence, wherein the beneficence was real, of Voltaire's sixty-years-long career of knight-errantry in letters. But Voltaire, what ever he may have been that was admirable, certainly was not the great emancipator of us all that Mr. Lowell too readily admitted him to have been; and certainly he was not the radiant center of intellectual light, the moral regenerator, that he falsely appears as having been, throughout the "long-illuminated" pages of Mr. Morley's eulogy.

“Eulogy” I call Mr. Morley’s monograph; for such really it is, far more than it is the candid critical biography which it purports to be. To be sure, Mr. Morley does, as I have noted, spread out with tolerable fulness the faults and the weaknesses of Voltaire; but, according to a method in “critical” treatment peculiarly Mr. Morley’s own, the critic stands square up, and staring full in the face his own terrific indictment against his hero, proceeds, with unbated breath, to swear that hero the magnificent opposite of all that he has himself just irrefutably shown him to be. The audacity of the “critic” is so splendid that no wonder if many and many a reader is overborne by it to believe the praise to be true, in the very teeth of the facts at the same moment displayed which plainly prove the praise to be false. Altogether, to the reader who in reading rouses to think for himself, Mr. Morley’s “Voltaire” is a most staggering and bewildering performance.

For another example, Mr. Morley tells us that Voltaire was “the greatest mocker that ever lived.” This the world has long generally understood to be the character of Voltaire; but it was pertinent to my immediate purpose at the present point to bring out once more the circumstance that Mr. Morley himself distinctly acknowledges the fact. Mr. Morley, besides, gives us numerous instances of writing, or of conduct, on the part of Voltaire, conceived in the mocking vein. But this does not, as we have already seen, prevent Mr. Morley’s strongly saying that Voltaire was likewise “*always* serious in meaning.” Mr. Morley’s “always-serious” “greatest mocker that ever lived” was, according to this his “critical” English biog-

rapher, a singularly circumspect and generous user of mockery.

### VIII

THERE is one particular illustration of Voltaire's conscience in mocking that seems a favorite recourse with Mr. Morley; he recurs to it repeatedly. That illustration serves its eulogistic purpose very well—as long as, with docility, you take it on trust. If you explore in original documents for yourself, the illustration becomes decidedly less striking.

"There is," Mr. Morley avers (p. 223), "no case of Voltaire mocking at any set of men who lived good lives. He did not mock the English Quakers." "He was moved," Mr. Morley thinks, "by a genuine sympathy with a religion that could," etc.—namely, the religion of the Quakers. Mr. Morley even speaks of Voltaire's "revering" the Quaker "sect."

My readers shall judge for themselves of Mr. Morley's trustworthiness on this point.

Let me quote for them a few specimen passages from Voltaire's account of the Quakers. This is contained chiefly in his "Letters on the English." Mor-dant mockery the account certainly is not. It would not have suited Voltaire's polemic aim to make it such. What he wished was to point a contrast between Quakerism and Roman Catholicism—to the disadvantage of the latter. To do this effectively he, of course, had to praise the Quakers. But even so, the Quakers, as will be seen, do not get off without shrewd touches from that conscienceless wit of his—a wit so automatic



in its workings that Voltaire was hardly more master of it than it was master of Voltaire.

In his first letter, the lively Frenchman reports an interview of his, doubtless a fictitious interview, with an eminent Quaker. He seeks from this Quaker an account of his religious faith. The account is given in a series of answers rendered by him to questions from Voltaire. To Voltaire's readers it becomes at once evident that the object of the whole representation is more to throw ridicule on Catholicism than to impart information about Quakerism, far more than to praise it. Voltaire learns from the venerable Quaker that he (the Quaker) does not believe in baptism—has, in fact, never been himself baptized. "Ah, but how you would burn for it if the Holy Inquisition could get hold of you, cried I," says Voltaire; "in God's name, let me baptize you."

The Quaker presently asks Voltaire: "Are you circumcised?" "I replied that I had not that honor," says Voltaire. "Well, friend," said he, "you are a Christian without being circumcised, and I without being baptized."

About his own conduct of the interview, Voltaire remarks:

"I took good care not to dispute him [the Quaker]; there is nothing thus to be gained in dealing with an enthusiast; you must not point out to a man the faults of his mistress nor plead reasons to one divinely inspired."

These quotations fairly represent the spirit of the account. Some readers will perhaps find it difficult to agree with Mr. Morley in thinking that the account betrays "genuine sympathy," on Voltaire's part, with the religion of the Quakers. I should even like to

know how far off from outright "mocking" a thoughtful Friend, if appealed to, would pronounce to be an account, such as is indicated by the foregoing quotations, of his own religious faith. But let us proceed a little farther.

Mr. Morley (p. 85) says of Voltaire as a literary traveler and sojourner in England:

"No German could have worked more diligently at the facts."

I submit a specimen of this laborious German-like diligence, on Voltaire's part, in quest of the "facts." Voltaire, in a letter of his on the Quakers following the one from which I have quoted, explains how that sect came by their name. He says:

"George Fox adopted the practise of trembling, making contortions and grimaces holding in his breath, expelling it violently; the priestess at Delphi could not have done better. . . . His disciples did the same. Hence their name, Quakers, which means tremblers."

What is to be said of the critic who thinks that "sympathetic"? Of the critic who repeatedly makes Voltaire's treatment of the Quakers an evidence of Voltaire's fundamental seriousness and goodness of heart?

Now as to the "facts"—at which, according to Mr. Morley, Voltaire labored with all a Teuton's diligence. Here is George Fox's own account of the origin of the name "Quakers." In his "journal," which is of course the chief, if not the only, authority on the point, Fox, founder of the sect, relates (the year 1650) that Justice Bennett, of Derby, was the "first that called us Quakers, *because I bid them tremble at the word of the Lord.*"

A "genuinely sympathetic" narrator surely ought, by the exercise of German diligence in "working at the facts," to have been able to arrive at a somewhat less ambiguous result than that which Voltaire, with his quizzing glance at the priestess of Delphi, actually produced for the public, when he explained as he did the origin of the appellation "Quakers."

## IX

ALL this respecting Voltaire on the Quakers, however interesting, is here pertinent only as throwing its measure of light on Mr. Morley's trustworthiness as critic. The state of the case with Mr. Morley is as if he said of his heroes things to their advantage without asking himself seriously that necessary question, "Are these things true?" Not that he falsifies points of fact. He tells the strict truth, or aims to do so, when he writes as biographer or historian proper. It is when he writes as biographical or historical critic that his temptation assails him to make assertions independent of truth. He may persuade himself that he is, on each occasion, merely giving both sides of the case, or that he is merely taking into account, as the accomplished critic should, the local, the temporal, the national, the social, and the individual, conditions of the case. But no such subjective illusion of critical impartiality can avail to reduce and reconcile stubborn objective self-contradictions. Mr. Morley should remember the principle, which he himself lays down in his discussion of "Compromise," that "if one opinion is true, its contradictory can not be true too, *but is a*

*lie and partakes of all the evil qualities of a lie.*" For my own part, by the way, the words of Mr. Morley which I have ventured to italicize, I should suspect, had I written them myself, of being too passionate to be accurately true. A false "opinion" is not necessarily a "lie"; and if it were a "lie," it would not necessarily "partake of all the evil qualities of a lie." Mr. Morley himself has illustrated from Voltaire some styles of the lie marked by certain "evil qualities," which surely Mr. Morley's own false "opinions" concerning Voltaire conspicuously lack. Mr. Morley's false "opinions" seem none of them to partake of the "evil quality" of "mean self-love," which Voltaire's lies often emphatically did. And Mr. Morley says ("On Compromise")—very strongly again, after his vehement manner, which manner I indeed like, but which I deem not exactly "critical":

"The most lax moralist counts a lie wrong, even when the motive is unselfish."

But then about Voltaire's "purring pleasantries" (that is, lying flatteries) Mr. Morley assures us "there was nothing false." Mr. Morley holds ("On Compromise") that "every . . . kind of lying tends to infect character with the taint of meanness." Voltaire, however, who practised nearly "every kind of lying," seems somehow, if we are to believe Mr. Morley, to have cheated this "tendency"; for Voltaire, he says, had in his soul the aforesaid "vehement current of energetic hatred toward the black clouds" of "mean self-love." Astonishing sentence that, taken altogether—I mean Mr. Morley's sentence, before quoted about Voltaire's noble hatred of everything hateful—aston-



ishing sentence to be pronounced by a "critic" upon a man of whom the same critic relates, as Mr. Morley (p. 209) relates of Voltaire (the fund of such things in Mr. Morley is not easily exhausted), that after Frederick the Great died, he (Voltaire) having till then fed greedily at Frederick's crib, "wrote a prose lampoon on the king's private life *which is one of the bitterest libels that malice ever prompted*" [italics mine]. Mr. Morley does, however, let us remember, judicially remark that Voltaire "missed the peculiar emotion of holiness." There Mr. Morley is strictly critical. He does not exaggerate there. Voltaire, on the whole, really did fall short, he "missed," at just that particular point!

Mr. Morley is so intent, or rather—for let *me* be carefully critical—he seems so intent on being generous to Voltaire whether the facts are, or are not, kindly in his favor, that he sometimes obviously contradicts himself in two consecutive sentences, or even, it may happen, within the bounds of a single sentence. For example (pp. 329, 330) he says of Voltaire's domestic establishment at Ferney:

"Guests were incessant, and the hospitality [was] ungrudging."

The very next sentence is:

"He [Voltaire] complained during the Seven Years' War of the embarrassment of being a Frenchman, when he had to entertain daily, at dinner, Russians, English, and Germans."

The next following sentence is:

"He [Voltaire] protests that he is weary of being hotelkeeper in general for all Europe, and so weary was he at one time of this noisy and costly post that the establishment was partially suspended for upward of a year."

Voltaire's "hospitality was ungrudging," but he "complained" of having to exercise it. He ought not to have "complained" at least in the cases mentioned, for he was only giving back in very small measure what in one form or another he had himself first abundantly got—from Russia, from England, and from Germany.

In another case, Mr. Morley, having quoted from Voltaire certain expressions of reason why we should count thinkers like Newton more truly "great" than conquerors like Cæsar, says (p. 73):

"This may seem trite to us, . . . but we need only reflect, first, how new this was, even as an idea, in the France which Voltaire had quitted, and, second, how in spite of the nominal acceptance of the idea, in the England of our own time, there is, with an immense majority not only of the general vulgar but of the special vulgar who presume to teach in press or pulpit, no name of slight at once so disdainful and so sure of transfixing as the name of thinker."

A late eulogist of Mr. Morley, having pronounced him "a literary star of the first magnitude," proceeded to attribute to him the "well-coiled sentences and vigorous epigrams of a great master of our English tongue." The latter praise may well have been inspired by the sentence just quoted. The adjective "well-coiled" is, at any rate, very happily descriptive here. "Well-coiled" indeed, that sentence of Mr. Morley's is, in the sense of so wrapping up, as almost to disguise, its self-contradicting and nugatory meaning. Carefully uncoiled, it turns out to say this, namely, that people in general hold the thinker in the highest veneration, and at the same time, curiously enough, hold him in profoundest contempt. If any-

body thinks that Mr. Morley's word "nominal" saves his sentence from being, through self-contradiction, a *caput mortuum*, I have only to cite Mr. Morley himself (essay on Condorcet) speaking, like any commonplace, sensible man, of "the veneration that is paid to the thinker"—the sense being, generally, habitually, paid. The whole sentence in which the words just quoted occur, reads:

"Voltaire during his life enjoyed to the full not only the admiration that belongs to the poet, but something of the veneration that is paid to the thinker, and even something of the glory usually reserved for captains and conquerors of renown."

The truth may perhaps be that Mr. Morley, in the first instance, was expressing himself under a sense of smart from ungenerous gibes at himself or at his fellows in faith, in which they may have been ironically denominated "Thinkers"—with the indignity added of quotation-marks, possibly even with the extreme indignity also of the capital T. It seems a pity that such irony should be, as Mr. Morley confesses that it is, "so sure of transfixing its object." It is worth Mr. Morley's pondering whether a thinker whom people in general would sincerely "venerate" and refer to in print under that honorable title without using quotation-marks and without using the capital T—it is, I say, worth Mr. Morley's while to ponder whether *such* a thinker would be "transfixed," and lose his just critical calm sufficiently to speak superciliously of almost all English mankind at once, as "vulgar," "general vulgar," and "special vulgar."

Mr. Morley, as my readers have seen, called Voltaire's farce of confession and communion a "piece of *sportiveness*." Only a page or two before, he had said

(p. 342) that Voltaire, to a "well-worn list" of pretended reasons (rendered to his scandalized fellow freethinkers) for his conduct, "honestly added the one true reason, that he did not mean to be burned alive." So then it was *not* "sportiveness" after all. It had a reason, a serious reason! Nay, nay, but what "criticism"! Mr. Morley knows, first, that Voltaire neither really was, nor once thought himself to be, at this time (he was nearly seventy-five years old) in the smallest danger of being "burned alive"; and, second, that if he were in such danger, his "sportive" behavior would make matters worse rather than better for him. Voltaire's "one true reason," as I venture to think, was simply this, that he was a mocker. He mocked when he did the deeds and he mocked when he gave his reasons. He was fundamentally, and he became as it were helplessly, a mocker. A grave and earnest man like Mr. Morley will only compromise himself; he will not rehabilitate Voltaire, by glozing Voltaire's vices and trying to make a hero of him. Freethinking may be good, but such a freethinker as Voltaire does not recommend it. Mr. Morley himself is a far more persuasive example. His persuasiveness, however, which I can imagine to have been originally capable of becoming very great—Mr. Morley's persuasiveness goes nigh to being quite canceled when he sets forth such men as Voltaire and Diderot before us, and proclaims, "These be thy gods, O Freethinking!" Every man becomes known not only by what he himself seems to be, but by what he declares that he approves. One would be sorry indeed to be obliged at length to correct one's favorable impression of Mr. Morley by making that impression conform downward



to what in his monographs on Voltaire and Diderot he appears as approving. The "Diderot" is a still heavier burden than is the "Voltaire," for that candid reader to carry who is resolutely bent on admiring Mr. Morley. Of that, however, presently. Here we must not let the incidental interest of repudiating Mr. Morley's estimate of Voltaire seduce us to forget that not Voltaire himself but Mr. Morley as critic of Voltaire (and of Diderot) is our true subject of present discussion.

## X

BUT let me justify myself, if I can, before my readers. I am, then, not at present engaged in criticizing and estimating John Morley in his total inclusive capacity as writer. I am engaged only in criticizing and estimating him in his particular capacity as critical biographer of Voltaire and of Diderot. Of Mr. Morley in general as essayist, I am sincerely a foremost admirer. He is to me one of the most stimulating and most satisfying of writers. Purer beaten gold of wise thought I find nowhere than I find in him. But I make a distinction. It must not be in his monographs on Voltaire and on Diderot that I read. In these works, Mr. Morley's good genius deserts him. There seems here to be some sinister attraction of ulterior purpose that leads his generally sage critical instinct strangely astray. Let him treat Macaulay, or Carlyle, or Byron, or Condorcet even, or Turgot, or De Maistre, and Mr. Morley is excellent. I do not always agree, I almost always admire. I feel, indeed, everywhere the positivist's motive prevailing; but the

spirit despite is so clear and high, and the thought so patiently faithful, that I sigh and I rejoice with an exquisite strange mingling of pleasure and pain.

It is otherwise when I read Mr. Morley's "Voltaire" and his "Diderot." In these essays I seem to encounter an irreducible distraction of treatment. For myself, at any rate, I am hopelessly perplexed and bewildered. Take this one additional example. Mr. Morley is treating of Voltaire as historian and writer on history. Naturally enough, it occurs to his mind that there was a certain famous predecessor of Voltaire who demanded mention at the hands of the critic as a great reputed pathfinder in philosophic historical method. Mr. Morley accordingly essays to appreciate Bossuet under this character of his in parallel with Voltaire. He says (pp. 316 ff.):

"His [Bossuet's] merit is that he did in a small and rhetorical way what Montesquieu and Voltaire afterward did in a truly comprehensive and philosophical way."

Bossuet's "small and rhetorical way" seems to have a degree of expansion when Mr. Morley comes to describe it. It was, in Mr. Morley's own words, to "press forward general ideas in connection with the recorded movements of the chief races of mankind"; to "declare the general principle that religion and civil government are the two points on which human things revolve"; to point out "the concatenation of the universe"; to point out "the interdependence of the parts of so vast a whole"; to lay it down that there comes "no great change without having its causes in foregoing centuries"; to declare it "the true object of history to observe in connection with each epoch those secret dispositions of events which prepared the way

for great changes as well as the momentous conjunctures which more immediately brought them to pass."

Such, according to Mr. Morley himself, was Bossuet's "small and rhetorical way." If Bossuet's "small and rhetorical way" embraced so much which, in spite of Mr. Morley's attenuating adjectives, will to most persons look fairly large and philosophical, what, the reader may be tempted to wonder, did it lack? According to Mr. Morley, it lacked emancipation from the notion of a divine Providence superintending all in obedience to a purpose of grace revealed in the Bible. That lack, so far as Mr. Morley makes appear, was all that prevented Bossuet from "rising philosophically into the larger air of universal history, properly so called."

Well, under exactly that lack, Voltaire, of course, could not suffer. But, alas, Voltaire, he, too—had, not indeed the same, but a quite equal, disqualification. With Voltaire likewise, so Mr. Morley says (p. 325):

"The plan is imposed from without, just as in Bossuet's case, not carefully sought from within the facts themselves."

The two, then, Bossuet and Voltaire, are, in Mr. Morley's view, equally wanting at the only point at which Mr. Morley teaches us that Bossuet is wanting at all. This being so, what is it in Voltaire's historic method which makes him, on the whole, so superior to Bossuet—in short, leaves Bossuet to be "small and rhetorical," while he (Voltaire) rises to be "truly comprehensive and philosophical"? An interesting question, which Mr. Morley (p. 325) himself raises, and to which he gives a most remarkable answer—an answer deserving our very best attention. The form

itself of his asking of the question deserves notice; it is this:

"If he [Voltaire] gives no explanation of the course of history, none to himself probably, and none to us assuredly, what is his merit?"

Which is much the same as asking, "If Voltaire, after all, was not 'philosophical,' what was it that made him 'truly philosophical,' after all?"

Mr. Morley's answer to his own question is worthy of the question itself. He says:

"This, that he [Voltaire] has fully placed before us the history which is to be explained; that he has presented the long external succession of facts in their true magnitude and in a definite connection; that he did not write a history of France, or of the papacy, or of the Mohammedan power, or of the crusades, but that he saw the advantage, as we see the unavoidable necessity, of comprehending in a single idea and surveying in a single work the various activities, the rise and fall of power, the transference from one to another of political predominance, the contributions to the art of living, among the societies which were once united in a single empire."

Straighten out the foregoing "well-coiled sentence"—there is felicity, unconscious on the part of the eulogist, in this praise of Mr. Morley's style—and you have it for Voltaire's merit, according to Mr. Morley, that he undertook to write general European history. Mr. Morley himself on a subsequent page (328) condenses this claim for Voltaire into almost exactly this expression of my own, when, after having, in criticism accumulated upon criticism, virtually denied to the Frenchman every possible merit as a "truly philosophical" historian, he adds:

"Nevertheless, it was much to lead men to study the history of modern Europe as a whole."



So it turns out at last that, whereas it was "small and rhetorical" in Bossuet to project history on a universal scale, inclusive of the whole world and of all time, it was, on the contrary, in Voltaire, "truly comprehensive and philosophical" to project history on a partial scale, inclusive only, or chiefly, of modern Europe!

And this is "criticism" of the "modern" order—"criticism" "absolutely undisturbed [p. 245] by the thought of that claim of Christianity to be a crowning miracle of divine favor"!

"Truly philosophical" in history, Mr. Morley pronounces Voltaire to be, and yet he tells us expressly (p. 328) that Voltaire neither "made any contribution nor seems to have been aware of the importance of contributing, to that study of the fundamental conditions of the social union" which others had begun before him, and which, as I, the present writer, may myself venture to say, most of us include in the very idea of "truly philosophical" history. Mr. Morley says also (p. 317):

"In a word, the inner machinery of societies and of their movement remains [for all Voltaire's work] as far from our sight as it ever was."

And yet Voltaire did his historical work in a "truly philosophical" way!

It may be added that this "truly philosophical" French master in history is said (p. 271) by Mr. Morley to have missed seeing what the "ground ideas were against which he was fighting"—that is, was fighting his whole life long—and this "partly from want of historic knowledge, partly from insufficient depth of nature," two very singular equipments, though both

of them undoubtedly Voltaire's, for treating history in a "truly comprehensive and philosophical" way!

It is curious to note that Mr. Morley is complacent enough over his critical exhaustion of the merit of Bossuet to duplicate, almost word for word, two or three pages of it in two different essays of his, that on Turgot and that on Voltaire. My own study of the passage, as it appears in the context surrounding it in the "Voltaire," by no means disposes me to share the author's complacency. The critic at this point was, as I think, overborne by the polemic. For, the atheistic polemic surely it was who found the way of Voltaire large and philosophical in contrast with a "small and rhetorical way" in Bossuet.

## XI

It would be almost endless to follow up Mr. Morley in his "Voltaire" and his "Diderot," and point out exhaustively the inconsistencies and self-contradictions that there infest his pages. On page 29 of the "Voltaire," he tells us that "in France the *first* effective enemy of the principles of despotism was Voltaire." On page 30 of the same book, he tells us that *before* Voltaire, Des Cartes, and Bayle, in France, "both had touched the prevailing notions of French society with a *fatal* breath." Assuredly if there were any such things as "prevailing notions" in French society at that time, "despotism" was one of them. On pages 10, 11, Voltaire is represented as a "dogmatic destroyer," in discrimination from the "doubting critical type" of man; is further pronounced no "mere critic." On

page 38, Mr. Morley, in his characteristic strong style of statement, says that Voltaire "is perhaps the one great Frenchman who has known how to abide in patient contentment with an all but purely critical reserve." A triumphant eulogist at least, Mr. Morley is, if not a successful critic. He first finds that Voltaire was *not* a mere critic, and then he finds that in fact he *was* pretty much a mere critic; and, with great impartiality, he praises him both for being such and for not being such.

I have intimated that Mr. Morley's "Diderot" is more eagerly polemic, and it might therefore be presumed to be more flagrantly uncritical, than even his "Voltaire." This is indeed the fact, and it is only as it were by chance that I have thus far devoted my attention exclusively to the latter work. Let us not neglect the "Diderot" altogether.

But I check myself once more. My sincere desire is to do Mr. Morley in every regard the amplest justice. I do indeed accord to him a large measure not only of intellectual, but of moral, respect. I respect him morally so much that it is of the nature of a real denial to me not to be able to respect him *more*. Positivist he is, but he is a positivist of the very highest and noblest type. His moral, one might almost say his spiritual, elevation is such that he has sometimes been spoken of as a kind of Puritan among positivists. When, a few years ago, he withdrew from letters to make politics his sphere of exertion, one influential organ of opinion having, in the same article, pronounced him "a literary star of the first magnitude," expressed itself besides in the following remarkable language:

"He has been and still is a great preacher of righteousness, of compassion, of purity, and of justice."

That is enviable praise for any man to deserve. Does Mr. Morley deserve it? Yes, and No, both, must, I think, be the double and ambiguous answer. One might select, from Mr. Morley's writings, expressions of sentiment conceived in a tension of moral severity such as could hardly be surpassed, if equaled, elsewhere in literature. Let me recall two examples already once cited:

"Every . . . kind of lying tends to infect character with the taint of meanness." "The most lax moralist counts a lie wrong, even when the motive is unselfish."

What uncompromising austerity of ethical tone! Positivism seems to be putting Puritanism itself to the blush.

Mr. Morley, when he wrote those strong, stern words, was treating a phase of his subject, namely, the subject of "Compromise," which led him on still farther to describe and to characterize a certain course of conduct in words even stronger and sterner. The mere description itself, which I here reproduce, has sufficiently the effect of tremendous indictment:

"We all of us know men who deliberately reject the whole Christian system, and still think it consistent with uprightness to summon their whole establishments round them at morning and evening, and on their knees to offer up elaborately formulated prayers which have just as much meaning to them as the entrails of the sacrificial victim had to an infidel haruspex. We see the same men diligently attending the services at church or chapel; uttering assents to confessions of which they really reject every syllable; kneeling, rising, bowing, with deceptive solemnity, even partaking of the sacrament with a consummate



devoutness that is very edifying to all who do not know that they are acting a part."

(That which Mr. Morley, in the foregoing language, describes is, I judge, more likely to occur in English than it is in American society.)

Mr. Morley is not contented to leave a description in itself so branding unaccompanied with a characterization adapted to match it. He expressly stigmatizes, as it merits, the ethical quality of the conduct described. It is the "grossest hypocrisy," a "very degrading form of deceit," a "singularly mischievous kind of teaching."

In such expressions as I have thus adduced, Mr. Morley, beyond question, appears a veritable "preacher of righteousness." One feels braced, in tonic moral sympathy with this indignant virtue as of a modern Hebrew prophet.

## XII

BUT now with what has been shown, put in contrast what I shall presently show, and reconcile, if you can, the one with the other. The proposed collation of passages will, I think, make it easily understood how to the question, Does Mr. Morley deserve to be called a "preacher of righteousness"? the only adequate answer returnable is the indeterminate one, that he does, and that he does not.

Strange as it may seem for me to say so, I really think that the language quoted above, pronouncing him a "great preacher of righteousness, of compassion, of purity, and of justice," very well describes the

character which Mr. Morley, antichristian though he is, means to bear and the mission in the world which he means to fulfil. But his resultant influence is not likely to be such as is his purpose. He commits himself much too far sometimes in justifying and glorifying the opposite of "righteousness" and "compassion" and "purity" and "justice."

There is Diderot, for example. Diderot came finally to be an atheist, a thoroughgoing atheist, and, as such, he was, even more than Voltaire—who remained a deist—a man after Mr. Morley's own heart. Now conceivably an atheist may be a 'righteous' man (as toward his fellows), a 'compassionate' man, a 'pure' man, a 'just' man. Such a man I, for my part, figure to myself Mr. Morley, an atheist, as being. But such a man Diderot emphatically was not. Diderot had a large nature, and his large nature was streaked with generosity. That statement, if we add that he was an indefatigable hard worker, pretty much exhausts Diderot's mental and moral merit. Try this Frenchman by his relation to his wife. Diderot's wife, Mr. Morley himself (Vol. I., pp. 32, 33) describes with these touches; I feel constrained with sincere reluctance to call attention to what, in the second sentence, seems a covert, intentional, sly deduction from the praise that had to be bestowed on Diderot's wife—forsooth, a devoted wife, but in the small way characteristic of women in general!

"She was dutiful, sage, and pious. She had plenty of that devotion which in small things women so seldom lack. While her husband went to dine out, she remained at home to dine and sup on dry bread, and was pleased to think that the next day she would double the little ordinary for him. Coffee was

too dear to be a household luxury, so every day she handed him a few halfpence to have his cup and to watch the chess-players at the *café de la Régence*. When after a year or two, she went to make her peace with her father-in-law [who had opposed the marriage], she wound her way round the old man's heart by her affectionate caresses, her respect, her ready industry in the household, her piety, her simplicity."

Mr. Morley then remarks philosophically:

"It is, however, unfortunately possible for even the best women to manifest their goodness, their prudence, their devotion, in forms that exasperate. Perhaps it was so here."

That ungenerous "perhaps"! But Mr. Morley was doing his best, with general remark and with conjecture, to prepare his reader for something concerning his atheist hero that was immediately to follow, namely, this:

"While his wife was away on her visit to his family, he [Diderot] formed a connection with a woman [Madame Puisieux] who seems to have been as bad and selfish as his wife was the opposite."

Mr. Morley again (p. 34):

"During a second absence of his wife, he [Diderot] formed a new attachment which lasted to the end of the lady's days."

And what has our "great preacher of righteousness, of compassion, of purity, and of justice," what has Mr. Morley, to say of these things? Why, this:

"There is probably nothing very profitable to be said about all this domestic disorder."

Not a word, not a syllable, of honest, hot, indignant blame for that unrighteous, that cruel, that impure, that unjust husband—in conduct too toward a wife against whom Mr. Morley (professed peculiar cham-

pion too he of women!) could find nothing to say in accusation, nothing except that gratuitous, that unpardonably ungenerous, hypothetical "perhaps"!

In later years, the "picture" of Diderot's domestic life becomes, Mr. Morley says (Vol. I., p. 249), "grievous and most afflicting to our thoughts." And this is the picture:

"Diderot returned in the evening from Holbach's [where he has been enjoying munificent hospitality with his brother atheists], throws his carpetbag in at the door, flies off to seek a letter from Mademoiselle Voland [Diderot's second 'connection'], writes one to her, gets back to his house at midnight, finds his daughter ill, puts *cheerful and cordial* questions to his wife; she replies with a tartness that drives him back into silence. Another time the scene is violent. . . . He groans in anguish."

And now Mr. Morley, the "great preacher of righteousness, of compassion, of purity," pacifies his sense of duty by effusing—what follows:

"So sharp are the goads in a divided house; so sorely, with ache and smart and deep-welling tears, do men and women rend into shreds the fine web of one another's lives! But the pity of it, O the pity of it!"

I must stop abruptly or something will escape me not consistent with the respect which I desire to show toward the distinguished subject of this paper.

A serious question importunately asks itself: Does this naturally noble-minded man, as practical "preacher of righteousness," illustrate in his own character the inevitable moral degeneration implied by the apostle to wait on those who do not like to retain God in their knowledge? If not, how, then, in what different way, shall we account for the strange, the appalling, tenor of Mr. Morley's laudatory ethical sen-



tences pronounced, in the face of his own damnatory statements of fact, upon his eighteenth-century French heroes of freethinking and atheism? And these laudatory sentences on Voltaire and on Diderot pronounced by Mr. Morley are not incidental merely, *obiter dicta*, admitting of excision; they are of the very substance, of the animating *motive*, of his volumes. The fashion of the day is comprehensive liberalism; but, as toward atheism at least, such is not the fashion of the Bible. And John Morley seems to me to be an involuntary noble example of the inseparable and irresistible mischievous moral tendency of atheistic views held however purely.

### XIII

I HOPE no one will mistake the purpose with which I have written here. I have not sought to confute Mr. Morley as to Voltaire and as to Diderot. I have merely sought to give Mr. Morley a fair chance to confute himself, and thus to appear plainly, by indisputable evidence out of his own work, the untrustworthy critic that he is of Voltaire and of Diderot.

TOLSTOY



# TOLSTOY

## I

THE temptation is strong to be extravagant, or at least so to express myself as to seem extravagant, in treating my present subject. Having, however, passed through several successive stages of opinion, or of impression, respecting his work, I can not, I think, be premature now in declaring Tolstoy for me one of the very greatest minds to be encountered in literature. Shall I seem immediately to recall this sentence, if I add that the one thing lacking to complete greatness in Tolstoy is final soundness and justness of judgment ?

It is, I confess, a serious, perhaps it is even a vital, deduction of praise that I thus make. The deduction, however, needs to be made. Let it stand; and then the estimate of Tolstoy which, despite, I venture here to set forth may serve at least to show how compelling my sense is of greatness in him—true greatness, though thus unbalanced and incomplete. Comprehensive intellect, imperial imagination, immeasurable capacity of all human experience, elemental passion by turns Titanic and womanly, gift of utterance adequate to full self-expression, and in fine a certain demigodlike ease and unconsciousness in the exertion of power—



these things in Tolstoy make up a complex and indivisible whole, a prodigy of mass and of force, which at times in encountering it you involuntarily feel to be fairly overwhelming. Your emotion is qualified with a sentiment approaching to awe.

With an intellectual sentiment such; but with a moral sentiment of what sort? Do you not reprobate as vehemently as you admire? Some seem to do so; nay, even to reprobate more vehemently than they admire. To examine fairly what degree, if any, of moral reprobation, what degree of intellectual admiration, is justified by the actual facts of the case—that is the object of the present paper.

We do not need to separate the man from the writer in estimating Tolstoy. The separation, in truth, is impossible. The two are one and the same. Tolstoy lives one life, whether in the world or in his books. His life in his books is simply less hindered than is his life in the world. The expression of his thought he masters and molds in his words more easily and therefore more perfectly than he does in his acts—that is all the difference; language is more plastic under his hand than is circumstance. The ideal man, and therefore the actual, the man that he would be and that therefore he is—the true Tolstoy—is best seen in his books.

To his books, then, let us turn for our study of Tolstoy.

Eighteen volumes of them in English translation I have lying before me as I write, and my list is not complete. Tolstoy has been a free and fruitful, you might even call him a voluminous, producer.

The first thing, perhaps, to strike one who reads

Tolstoy's writings is the singular frankness of the writer. Some of these writings are distinctly and avowedly autobiographic, others are disguisedly so, and all, read rightly between the lines, are full of revelation to the reader of the character, and even of the career, of the author. "My Confession," "My Religion," are titles that obviously belong to books dealing with the author's own personal experience. "Childhood, Boyhood, Youth," entitles in English an ostensible fiction which is understood to be virtual fact out of Tolstoy's own earlier life. His greater books, "War and Peace" and "Anna Karénina," are novels—not romances, but novels of a peculiar sort—which, beyond even what in such writing is unavoidable, manifestly present the writer's own personality to the reader. In "War and Peace" one of the principal characters—the principal one, indeed, if that one be principal which though not the most heroic yet serves most to give its unity to the novel—is undoubtedly Tolstoy himself. In "Anna Karénina," too, the author plays an unheroic part as one of the characters. Tolstoy has not shrunk from showing his own inmost thought to the public. In fact, to do this may be said to be the object of his authorship. He has written supremely for the purpose of disclosing to the world, but primarily to Russia, his thought. Nobody perhaps ever more entirely fulfilled the famous precept, "Look into your own heart and write." Take the following for an example of the deep-going frankness with which he has come to be willing to open himself to the public. He is giving an account of the process of self-scrutiny through which he passed to arrive at his present solution of the problem of life. His question with himself

was, What ought I to do? He says (the italics are mine):

“I propounded the query to myself; but in reality I had answered it in advance, in that I had in advance defined the sort of activity which was agreeable to me, and by which I was called upon to serve the people. I had, in fact, asked myself, ‘In what manner could I, *so very fine a writer*, who had acquired so much learning and talents, make use of them for the benefit of the people?’”

Tolstoy seems never to have said to himself, ‘Go to now, I will produce a book—novel or other.’ His one aim has been simply somehow to wreak *himself* upon expression. “A most voiceless thought” within him has been incessant anguish to his soul till he could find for it a voice. A novel, for instance, has been nothing to him as a novel—that is, as a mere literary work of art. He has chosen that literary form purely as a convenient but otherwise an almost unregarded vehicle of expression to his thought; his thought, or what is always the same thing with Tolstoy, his message to men. This, and not any defect of the artist’s instinct in him, accounts for the comparatively formless structure of his novels.

The artist’s instinct in Tolstoy, in fact, is strong, very strong; it only is not predominating. The predominating instinct in him is the instinct to teach. He is a teacher, and only for that reason not, most characteristically, an artist. If I were to modify at all Mr. Howells’s hardly extravagant sentence upon him, I might, instead of pronouncing Tolstoy “incomparably the greatest writer of fiction who ever lived,” prefer to pronounce him the greatest mind that ever sought to express itself in the form of the novel. His

noblest novel, judged strictly as a novel, might well admit some equals, if not some superiors. But if, judged more freely as a repository of profound and various wisdom, not less than as a series of pictures transferred to the printed page out of the vast and endless moving panorama of human life—if, when thus judged, Tolstoy's "War and Peace" has, I will not say any superior, any *equal*, in fiction, that equal certainly it has not been my fortune to encounter, or in encountering to recognize. Nay, few in any kind of literature are the books which, judged as I have indicated, I could admit to be the peers of this great masterpiece of Tolstoy. "Anna Karénina" is, however, judged as a piece of literary art, a better novel than "War and Peace."

The second thing to impress the student of Tolstoy is the note of sincerity that runs through his works. You feel that whatever may be the artistic merit, or whatever the value of truth and wisdom, belonging to these writings, the writings, at any rate, reflect the real sentiments and convictions of the writer. He may be singular, erratic, eccentric, but his departures from the customary and conventional are not affectations. He differs apparently because he differs really. Know him well through his books and you may indeed be confirmed in thinking him mistaken, but you will certainly be compelled to yield to him the involuntary tribute of respect due to a soul evidently smitten with love of the truth.

We need not, but we may, go to his life for proof of this. Tolstoy is a rich Russian noble who teaches that men ought to live for the service of others, not for the service of themselves. In one of his later



books, an expressly and directly and most aggressively didactic volume, translated under the title "What to Do?" he lays it down that for every man "true happiness consists solely in renunciation of self and the service of others." (Tolstoy's doctrine of "renunciation," here expressed, is by no means to be identified with the doctrine inculcated under the same name by Goethe. Goethe taught that the "prime wisdom" for the conduct of life was to give up willingly the good that you could not succeed in making your own. It was really not at all renunciation *of* yourself, but as nearly as possible the opposite of this, namely, renunciation *for the sake of* yourself. In sharp antithesis, Tolstoy teaches to renounce yourself, and, observe, to do this not for your own sake, but for the sake of others. The contrast of Tolstoy with Goethe is the difference, all the difference, of altruism from egoism.)

George Kennan, a truly accomplished observer and narrator, having visited Tolstoy on his estate, reports that he found this unique nobleman occupying the plainest of houses and wearing the plainest of clothes. His morning he had spent, this wealthy landed proprietor, the greatest, the most popular, of living Russian writers, the author of "War and Peace," had spent, how, would you guess?—in spreading manure with his own hands on the ground of a poor widow, his neighbor. I remember reading at one time a paragraph in a newspaper which said that there was a threat of legal proceedings to be instituted against Count Tolstoy on the ground of insanity, in case "he attempts to carry out his plans of selling all that he has and giving the money to the poor." I am far at this moment from insisting that what I thus mention

in the conduct of Tolstoy is wholly to be admired and praised. It may be enthusiasm, perhaps pushed to the verge of fanaticism, of lunacy; but assuredly when a teacher so puts his teaching in practise, that teacher can no longer be accused of lacking sincerity.

## II

BUT Tolstoy is more than merely sincere. He is earnest. His earnestness makes him a teacher. It is for him not enough that he has found a truth for himself. He must immediately communicate the truth found to his fellows. His sincerity would keep him from saying what he did not believe; his earnestness forces him to say what he does believe, in order that others also may believe it with him.

Tolstoy's earnestness it is that has made him treat so lightly, almost disdainfully, what we may call the technics of his fiction. He seems never to have sought to secure unity, orderliness, steady progress, cumulation, completeness, for his novels, as if his art were to him an end in itself. His art, in fact, has never been to him an end in itself, but always, in incessantly increasing degrees, a means to an end. His zeal as a teacher has consumed his zeal as an artist. For myself I feel that his greatness as a man has forbidden his being absorbed in his art. There is more of him than could go into the measure of a profession. His moral earnestness has worked like a leaven in him to expand irresistibly his personal proportions. It has made him overflow the bounds of the novelist's art.

Tolstoy has accordingly of late, for the most part, ceased writing novels and taken to writing didactics pure and simple—didactics direct and undisguised; didactics eager, fervid, white-hot. Read his “What to Do?” and understand what these adjectives of mine mean. I commit myself now not in the least to the truth and soundness and fruitfulness of his doctrine; but I say that never since the world was made did doctrine get itself more frankly, more sincerely, more earnestly, and I will add more eloquently, set forth. What a voice is this man’s, crying in the world’s wilderness of diletteism, finical self-culture, art for the sake of art! Were it not for a certain lack, a lack presently to be indicated, it would seem like the voice of a veritable John the Baptist forerunning the kingdom of heaven. Hear him flout the novelists—flout himself, that is to say, and his guild:

“The very people whom we have undertaken to serve have become the objects of our scientific and artistic activity. We study and depict them for our amusement and diversion. We have totally forgotten that what we need to do is not to study and depict them, but to serve them!”

Edifying contrast that—and that is the strain of all Tolstoy’s teaching—edifying contrast to the teaching of Goethe! Here is a Russian, with—let me not fear to say it—with as much strength of genius in his little finger as the overpraised German had in all his loins—here at last, and where you might least have expected it, is a giant teaching with a giant’s power the gospel, not of culture, far less of self-culture, but of self-sacrifice and of ministration to others. Hear him again; a soul might stir under the ribs of death at such life-giving sound:

"Scientific and artistic activity, in its real sense, is only fruitful when it knows no rights, but recognizes only obligations. . . . The thinker or the artist will never [in the true state of things] sit calmly on Olympian heights, as we have become accustomed to represent them to ourselves."

With that, compare the speech to himself of the man, doubtless Goethe, shown in Tennyson's "Palace of Art":

"And 'while the world runs round and round,' I said,  
'Reign thou apart, a quiet king,  
Still as, while Saturn whirls, his steadfast shade  
Sleeps on his luminous ring.'"

No wonder Mr. Kennan could report a man of Tolstoy's burning earnestness as speaking "slightly, almost contemptuously, of his [own] works of fiction." No wonder that a man of Tolstoy's burning earnestness—an earnestness grown quite incandescent now and capable of consuming in him utterly the subordinate motive of artistic ambition and pleasure and pride—reached at length a conscious crisis in his self-knowing in which he could feel:

"It was necessary for me to repent, in the full sense of that word, *i.e.*, entirely to alter my conception of my position and my activity; to confess the hurtfulness and emptiness of my activity instead of its utility and gravity; to confess my own ignorance instead of culture; to confess my immorality and harshness in the place of my kindness and morality; instead of my elevation, to acknowledge my lowliness."

It is easy for an earnest man to be courageous, and Tolstoy is courageous. He faces without blenching the consequences of his doctrine. Courage it is, and not mere vainglory of singularity or impassiveness of vulgar bravado, that steadies him to propound his



teaching in the teeth of universal dissidence and almost universal scorn. He knows well and he feels keenly the attitude toward himself that the unbelieving world assumes. He puts it into brutal language supposedly spoken of himself—language which does not overexpress the truth as to the world's regard of Tolstoy:

“He [Tolstoy] repudiates science and art; he wants to send people back again into a savage state; so what is the use of listening to him and of talking to him?”

But the wind of opposition can not blow so broad and so strong that he will not stand up alone and speak against it. He is a prophet, and prophesy he must, whether men will hear or forbear. His voice falters never a note. His whole message gets itself uttered. And his courage is not the courage of despair. His cause may be desperate, but its champion is not. His courage bears the supreme test—the test of being strained up to the pitch of hope. Tolstoy is hopeful, that last obduracy of noble mind.

In the case of such a man as Tolstoy—but I should say, in the case of Tolstoy, for when ever was there “such a man” as Tolstoy?—it would be absurd to note, for an illustration of courage on his part, his recent declaration of opinion concerning Shakespeare, not only denying greatness to him, but denying to him even mediocre merit as poet and dramatist. For any other literary man, highly regarded, such a declaration of opinion might be justly esteemed an act of supreme courage. But not for Tolstoy. His courage is so absolute that for him no exertion of it was necessary to enable him to declare himself in this sense on this subject. In his case, the act might be charged to

eccentricity in him amounting to madness. But the madness with him had here a method so sane and so lucid, not to say so convincing, that the theory of madness to account for his extraordinary declaration of opinion is out of the question. For Tolstoy takes up a representative play, the tragedy of "King Lear," and goes through it, with candid, calm, dispassionate criticism, to find this unequalled masterpiece of genius very poor, very unworthy, dramatic art. No one, with adequate intelligence, can candidly, calmly, dispassionately read this searching criticism of Tolstoy's, and not feel it to be the work of a perfectly sane intellect, and of an artistic sense exercised through much practise and much self-discipline to a fine capacity of discernment and judgment. Do I then give in to Tolstoy's estimate of Shakespeare? I am far from saying that. My own courage has its limits. It is not absolute. But I should like to see a good answer to Tolstoy's criticism of Lear. No answer has, so far as I know, been attempted. For some reason, the criticism seems not even to have been sneered at. It has been met in what is no doubt the most effective way of confutation, the way of ignoring, of silence. Meantime it stands as at least an irrefutable evidence that Tolstoy has been, has probably always been, a self-conscious artist in his literary work. No other than such an artist could have produced such a criticism.

A more spectacular exhibition of courage, Tolstoy's very recent manifesto of protest against the Government of Russia for stupidity and cruelty, might be regarded as being. But, I for my part, regard it less in this light than as a great act of humanity on Tolstoy's

part. It is demonstration, given, as it were, on a colossal scale, of the largeness and the tenderness of his democratic heart. At the same time, it is of course an extraordinary proof of Count Tolstoy's overtopping, overawing, world-wide, ascendancy of fame that he can with impunity so indict and defy the despotic governing powers of Russia. He actually dares them—nay, he almost implores them—to put him in prison, or, better yet, hang him, in order that he may so be separated from his class, the aristocracy, and not be, by any possible seeming complicity, partaker of their evil deeds. Love of truth, of what he believes to be the truth, and love of his human brethren, explain, the former, Tolstoy's avowal of opinion about Shakespeare, and the latter, his unsparing arraignment of the cruel despotism that crushes his beloved Russia.

### III

CONSISTENCY is to be added to the count of Tolstoy's qualities as a writer. I quoted a little way back an expression of his revealing his conviction that the literary guild had proved recreant to their true mission—recreant to the motive which constitutes their sole valid reason for being—namely, that of serving the people. He urges this indictment against his own class with eloquent insistence. He says:

“While we have been disputing, one about the spontaneous origin of organisms, another as to what else there is in protoplasm, and so on, the common people have been in need of spiritual food; and the unsuccessful and rejected of art and science, in obedience to the mandate of adventurers who have in view

the sole aim of profit, have begun to furnish the people with this spiritual food, and still so furnish them. For the last forty years in Europe, and for the last ten years with us here in Russia, millions of books and pictures and song-books have been distributed and stalls have been opened, and the people gaze and sing and receive spiritual nourishment, but not from us who have undertaken to provide it; while we, justifying our idleness by that spiritual food which we are supposed to furnish, sit by and wink at it.

“But it is impossible for us to wink at it, for our last justification is slipping from beneath our feet. We have become specialized. We have our particular functional activity. We are the brains of the people. They support us, and we have undertaken to teach them. It is only under this pretense that we have excused ourselves from work. But what have we taught them and what are we now teaching them? They have waited for years—for tens, for hundreds of years. And we keep on diverting our minds with chatter, and we instruct each other and we console ourselves, and we have utterly forgotten them. We have so entirely forgotten them that others have undertaken to instruct them, and we have not even perceived it. We have spoken of the division of labor with such lack of seriousness that it is obvious that what we have said about the benefits which we have conferred on the people was simply a shameless evasion.”

That is brave, sincere, earnest writing. Is it sentimentalism, like Rousseau's? Sentimentalism no doubt it is, but not like Rousseau's. Rousseau said, but did not. Tolstoy says and does. He is consistent. He has, in fact, undertaken, and in great part has executed, a stupendous labor of Hercules in precisely such a service of the people as that which, in profuse public blame of himself, he did penance for so long neglecting. He has produced, with remarkable, with prodigious, fertility of invention, a whole library of literature expressly, effectively, dedicated to the people—the people in the most universal, democratic



sense of that word. His popular acceptance with his countrymen has been phenomenally great.

If the reader of these pages wishes to see, in a single comprehensive or at least representative specimen, what this generous intellectual giant has accomplished in the line of popular service here indicated, let him read, and be sure he read sagaciously, Tolstoy's story of "Ivan the Fool." He will find it, together with many companion stories, in the volume issued by T. Y. Crowell & Co., Tolstoy's American publishers (but now the Funk & Wagnalls Co. are establishing a claim to dispute this designation with the house just named), under the title "Ivan Ilyitch." This story, by the way, "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch," which gives its title to the volume, is a story of power such as may fairly be called terrific. It is a minor production of the author's, and it is pure moral didactics couched in the form of a fiction which, in Tolstoy's hands, has more force by far than the truth itself represented by it, though that truth is to be seen by us all in act everywhere around us every day of our lives. Realism in fiction never was achieved before. How cheap and how false Balzac, for example, seems in comparison! George Eliot—well, she still keeps her truth, but her measure of power, how different! Victor Hugo is a brother Titan of Tolstoy's, but he is a Titan of the theater rather than, like Tolstoy, of real life.

In "Ivan the Fool" Tolstoy, with original fabulist's power seldom surpassed, contrives to condense and yet make luminous like sunshine the whole sum of his radical teaching on social and political problems. He is reported to have been amazed, as well he might be, that this little allegory of his should have passed the

ordeal of the Russian censorship of the press. To have succeeded in making his story do this was a triumph of his genius and of his humor. The story is, so to speak, one broad grin of kindly-sarcastic humor from beginning to end, yet such as never for one moment to forget the intent didactic earnestness with which the author is writing. The very title is a master-stroke of humor, and of practical tact as well. Tolstoy's humor, by the way, would save him, if his common sense and his immense knowledge of the world did not, from being what some—knowing him, so I must guess, largely at second-hand—have pronounced him, a "crank." A "crank," I submit, could never have disengaged himself from himself, could never have relaxed his habitual tension, sufficiently to deal earnestly with the one doctrine which was dearest to him, under the form of an ironical apologue like "Ivan the Fool." A "crank" is a man in whom disproportionate earnestness has upset the balance of his practical judgment. Tolstoy's speculative judgment is, I think, not firmly balanced; but his practical judgment is as steady as his moral earnestness is strong. By the speculative judgment I mean that faculty which concerns itself with the finding and choosing of ends to be secured; by the practical judgment I mean that faculty which concerns itself with the finding and choosing of means for securing such ends. The cycle of popular tractates, stories, fables, and so forth produced by Tolstoy are a distinct addition to the wealth of literature. As a teaching force they will probably exert a formidable influence; but certainly as the proof of genius they can not be gainsaid. Under Herder's prompting, the German writers, animated by their

own purpose, which was to serve themselves, to fructify their own minds, to find matter for literature, went about to put into form, prose or verse, the tales current already in the mouths of the common people, who would thus at best get only what they gave. Barren, mendicant literature that! Tolstoy, instead of drawing on the people to enrich himself, draws on himself to enrich the people; and his genius, fed from secret springs, is great enough, full enough, free enough, always to respond, whatever the draft. I may say in passing that, beyond any other writer known to me, Tolstoy represents himself fully, or at least fully suggests himself, in his short pieces. The force which shaped the sun is the same force as that which shapes the dewdrop.

#### IV

THUS far, in estimating Tolstoy, we have dealt only with his moral characteristics; or incidentally, if at all, with his intellectual. Let his intellectual characteristics now engage us.

The most impressive intellectual characteristic of Tolstoy is undoubtedly quantity of power. In one word, he is intellectually a great man. The number and the variety of the things he has thought about and formed judgments upon, are enormous, are overwhelming. Equally extraordinary is the amount of the thinking that he has done on these things. Deep thinking, "high thinking," always, and generally wise thinking, too, he has done. But what most excites one's admiration is the mass, the might, of that organ

of thinking in the man which evidently has made all this easy to him. The process in his mind seems to have been like the working of an elemental power of nature. The overcoming of resistance has been so complete that you are beguiled almost to forget that there ever was any resistance to be overcome. You feel yourself face to face with a kind of qualified intellectual omnipotence.

A kind of qualified omniscience also is Tolstoy's. What is there that this universal mind does not appear to know? Of course I can not mean to include within the grasp of Tolstoy's knowledge the details and technicalities of the specialized sciences. With science, however, conceived largely and comprehensively, with science the unity, Tolstoy betrays effective familiarity. His experience of the world has been immense. Seldom indeed—I doubt if ever—has any novelist been equipped for his work with such resources of knowledge gained through long and wide and various personal experience of his own. And it has been personal experience affected, penetrated, made valuable, with original and independent personal thought. The knowledge has been converted into wisdom. I refer now especially to what is found in the novels written before Tolstoy fully espoused his present peculiar social and political views. Those novels, and indeed the author's works in general, no person wishing to enrich himself with the spoils won by the world's greatest thinkers can afford to neglect. The reality of Tolstoy's representations is such, and such is the sagacity of his interpretations, that to read him wisely stands the reader very well in stead of having himself the same opportunities of observation turned to



account with exceptionally clear and deep insight and reflection.

I have just spoken of the "reality" of Tolstoy's representations. Is Tolstoy, then, a "realist" among the "realists," so called, of modern fiction? I answer by saying that Tolstoy is too great a novelist to be classed in any such way as that term implies. He is alike a realist and a romancer, now one and now the other, and now again both at once. He is a realist in the sense of being true to the nature and to the life of what he represents; he is a romancer, a poet, in the sense of investing his work, when he pleases, with the authentic aura, the glorifying, the enchanting, atmosphere of the ideal. Wonderful is the poet's-power with which he will sometimes suddenly, on a scene of depressingly low or narrow or hard or cruel action, described by him with the impartial, remorseless, tell-tale veracity of the sunbeam reporting through the photographer's lens—wonderful, I say, is the poet's-power with which, now and again, Tolstoy, on such a scene of his, will dash down a sudden ray of the light that never was on sea or land. Take examples from "War and Peace." The first shall be of realism unrelieved, the others of realism foiled with the transcendent poetic quality of which I have spoken.

Petya is a young Russian in whom the reader has become sympathetically and admiringly interested as the darling, the Benjamin, of his affectionate mother, most reluctantly relinquished by her to go of his own will to the war of patriotic defense against the invading French. He is full of gallant desire to do brave things and to distinguish himself. He now, in the spirit of reckless, heroic adventure, dashes on horseback into a

place where shots were heard and where the gunpowder smoke was densest.

"A volley rang out; the bullets fell thick and fast and did their work. . . . The Frenchmen could be seen through the thick, billowing smoke, some throwing down their arms and coming out from behind the bushes to meet the Cossacks, others running down the slope to the Pond. Petya still rode his horse at a gallop, . . . but, instead of guiding him by the bridle, he was waving both his hands in the strangest, wildest manner, and was leaning more and more to one side of the saddle. His horse, coming on the camp-fire, which was smoldering in the morning light, stopped short, and Petya fell heavily on the wet ground. The Cossacks saw his arms and legs twitch, although his head was motionless. A bullet had entered his brain."

This abrupt end, unprepared for, of so much youthful bloom and high-hearted hope!—it is war, horrid war, in a realism like the thing itself which it describes. The abruptness it is, the surprise, the pathos stunning rather than melting the heart—like in both cases—that associates this in Tolstoy with that famous place of Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" over which the author himself, frankly feeling his own power, exclaimed, "There, that is genius." I refer to the following at the close of Chapter XXXII:

"No more firing was heard at Brussels—the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart."

Another example, now of a partly contrasted character, from the "War and Peace." The battle of Austerlitz is in progress. Prince André, a Russian, on the whole the most heroic figure in the novel, has been watching fixedly the struggle about a battery between

a group of Russians and a group of French. What he sees narrows itself down to a wrestle of one Russian with one Frenchman for the possession of a ramrod:

"He [André] could distinguish the furious and vindictive expression of their faces; it was quite clear that they were hardly conscious of what they were doing.

" "What are they about?" said Prince André to himself. "Why does not our man take to his heels as he has no arms, and why does not the Frenchman make an end of him? He will not have time to be off before the Frenchman gets a shot at him!" And just then a second Frenchman came up, and the fate of the red-haired Russian, who had wrenched the ramrod out of his adversary's hand, was sealed.

"But Prince André did not see the end. He felt a tremendous blow on his head, dealt, as it seemed to him, by some one close to him. The pain was sickening rather than acute, but it changed the current of his thoughts.

" "What has come over me? I can not stand—my legs have given way. . . ." And he fell on his back.

"Presently he opened his eyes to see the end of the struggle between the gunner and the Frenchman, and whether the guns had been rescued or captured. But he saw nothing but the deep, far-away sky above him, with light gray clouds lazily sailing across it.

" "What peace! what rest!" he thought. "It was not so just now when I was running; we were all running and shouting; it was not so when those two scared creatures were struggling for the ramrod—the clouds were not floating so then, in that infinite space! How is it that I never noticed those endless depths before? How glad I am to have seen them now—at last. Everything is a hollow delusion excepting that. . . . Thank God for this peace—this silent rest. . . ."

In that last paragraph there is something conversely akin to Pascal's sublime "These infinite spaces—how they affright me!"

Once more. In the same novel, "War and Peace,"

Pierre (probably more or less closely Tolstoy himself) is visiting, as senior friend summoned by her to counsel, a young girl who has fallen into great fault and consequent grievous trouble of despair and shame. She has, in fact, narrowly escaped eloping with a handsome villain, Pierre's own brother-in-law, who has dazzled and confused the child. Pierre says:

"'Did you love that, . . . ' he hesitated and colored, not knowing what name to give Anatole [the villain]. 'Did you love that wretch?'

"'Oh! do not call him so! I do not know. . . . I know nothing now.'

"Pity such as he had never felt in his life, a passionately tender emotion, surged up in Pierre's soul, so suddenly that his eyes filled with tears and overflowed; he felt them fall under his spectacles and hoped she might not observe them.

"'Say no more about it, my child,' he said, when he could control his voice; Natacha was struck by its pathos and sincerity. '. . . Regard me as your friend; if at any time you want advice or help, or even feel that it would be a comfort to you to confide in a faithful heart—not now, of course, but when your own mind is calm and clear—remember me! . . . I shall be happy to be of any use to you.'

"'Do not speak to me so—I do not deserve it!' cried Natacha, rising to leave him; but Pierre detained her. . . .

"'I must say to you, do not speak so, for you have all your life before you still.'

"'No, no,' she cried, 'I have nothing; all is over for me!'

"'No. All is not over,' Pierre went on eagerly. 'If I were any one but myself; if I were the handsomest, the cleverest, and the best man living—if I were free—I would ask you on my knees at this very moment to bestow on me your hand and your love.'

"Natacha, who till now had not shed a tear, broke down completely; she looked in his face with grateful melancholy and hurried out of the room.

"Pierre, hardly able to check his own tears, also hastened away."



Pierre, let me interrupt my citation to say, is a wealthy noble, very unhappily married. What he has thus said to Natacha may be differently considered, according to the bent of the individual reader—that is, either as an escape of mere passionate weakness on his part, in which perhaps there was not more of pity than of love; or as a magnanimous and delicate reassurance, of the strongest sort, intended to quicken despair with hope in the breast of the erring child. No immediate sequel of relationship between the two follows, and Tolstoy supplies no interpretation to the reader. This is quite in accordance with Tolstoy's not infrequent reticent suggestiveness. But now for that promised touch, occurring in this connection, of the poetic, the transcendent, with which the magician knows so well how to arch at will over his page "an ampler ether, a diviner air":

"He [Pierre] got into his wraps anyhow, and threw himself into his sleigh. . . . Everything seemed mean and small in comparison with the impulse of love and compassion that had come over him. . . .

"The night was exquisitely clear; above the dark and dirty streets and the tangled perspective of roofs spread the deep vault of the sky bejeweled with stars. As he contemplated those remote and mysterious spheres, which seemed to have something in common with his state of mind, he forgot the abject squalor of the world. When they came out on the Arbatskaia square, a wide horizon lay before him. Just in the middle blazed a pure luminary with a glorious train, surrounded by sparkling stars, that lay majestically displayed from the very margin of the earth; this was the famous comet of 1811—the comet which every one believed to be a warning of endless woes and of the end of the world. It caused Pierre no such superstitious terrors; his still moist eyes admired it with rapture. It looked to him like a bolt of flame that had rushed with giddy swiftness through measureless space to fall on that distant spot of earth

and now remained quivering and blazing into infinitude. That heavenly glory dispersed the gloom of his soul, and gave him a foresight of the diviner splendors of another life."

I shall not say that there is not something of the empty sentimental in that last sentence; but the sentimentalism is not the author's own, it is sentimentalism attributed, and under the circumstances attributed in accordance with the truth of illogical human nature. But what I now particularly point out in the passage is the lift given to the imagination by that unexpected, that audacious, that magnificent, appropriation by the novelist of an august and awful aspect of the physical universe to set it, not now by contrast but by association, into his picture of human experience. If this is realism, it is at least not realism of the Dutch sort. There is reach to it, horizon, aspiration. A man may breathe in such an atmosphere. The weight, the oppression is taken off. You are not stifled.

## V

ALMOST stifled, however, you are when you read passages, for example, like the following, which I take from Tolstoy's "Sevastopol." Here is realism unrelieved by any lifting, even at last, of the cloud, to let light in from another quarter than the dreadful world as it is. What weight, augmented by what power, of oppression you feel, like a nightmare, in such writing as this! A bombardment is in progress from which it is the Russians who suffer. The description narrows from the broad presentation, in which a historian might indulge, down to the experience of a single individual, near whom, terrifically near whom, a shell

has fallen with the fuse burning toward an imminent explosion. The passionate imagination of the writer conducts you into the innermost thought and feeling of the selected individual man endangered. There is no studied, elaborate rhetoric of exaggeration *about* the man's thought and feeling. His thought and feeling *themselves* are shown you, in visible palpitation, as if the living brain were uncovered, as if the beating heart were laid bare. You do not ask yourself, Is this true to the life? You unconsciously know it must be true to the life. You do not ask yourself, How does Tolstoy know that this is true to the life? For the moment, you would as soon ask, How does a creator know the thing that he has created? For such writing is indeed that mystery of imaginative creation which is in the incommunicable secret of genius.

There lies the man in that fearful companionship with the bomb on fire. Now Tolstoy:

“A terrible fear—a cold fear that banished every other thought and feeling—took hold of his whole being. He covered his face tightly with his hands. Not more than a second passed, but in that second a whole world of feelings, thoughts, hopes, reminiscences, flitted through his mind. ‘Who is wounded, I or Michaeloff? or both? and if I, where? If in the head, then it is all over with me; but if in the leg, they can cut it off, and I will ask them to be sure to use chloroform, and I may still drag through. Or it may be only Michaeloff is wounded: then I shall be able to tell the story how we were going side by side when he was killed, and how his blood spurted over me. No, it came much nearer me. . . . It is I who am hit!’ And then he remembered the twelve rubles he owed to Michaeloff; remembered another debt he had in Petersburg, which he ought to have settled long ago; and a Gypsy romance which he liked to sing in the evening next came into his head. The image of the woman whom he loved, wearing a little cap with lilac-colored ribbons,

rose up before him; and at the same time he thought of the man who five years ago had insulted him, and how he had never received any satisfaction for the insult. But inseparably together with these and a thousand other memories, the feeling of the actual present—how he lay there expecting to be killed the next instant—did not for a moment quit him. 'And yet, perhaps, after all, it will not burst,' he thought; and with the courage of despair he determined to open his eyes and look around him. And in that very instant, through the still-closed lids, his eyes were blinded with a fierce red fire, and something with a hideous crash struck him heavily in the breast. He rose up, tried to run away, got his feet entangled with his sword, and fell to the ground on his side. 'Thank God! I have escaped with a contusion!' was his first thought, and he tried with his hands to touch his breast. But his hands seemed to be chained down, and his head felt as if it were pressed in the grasp of a strong vice. Before his eyes suddenly flashed the figures of some soldiers, and he unconsciously began counting them. 'One, two, three, four soldiers, and there in his turned-down cloak is the officer,' he thought. And then a stroke, as of lightning, blinded his eyes; and he wondered what they were shooting, a mortar or a cannon? Probably a cannon. Another shot; more soldiers: five, six, seven soldiers, marching past. A horrid fear now came over him lest they should trample on him: he wanted to cry out to them that he was badly wounded; but his mouth was so parched that his tongue cleaved to the roof; and he was tortured with the agony of thirst. He felt that his breast was wet, and this feeling caused him to think of water, and he longed to drink, if it were only that with which his breast was streaming. 'Of course,' he thought, 'it is the blood flowing from the wound I got when I fell.' But the fear lest the soldiers who continued to flash by him should trample and crush him became more and more intense, so that at last he summoned what little strength he had, and wished to cry out, 'Take me!' but instead of that, gave a groan so piercing and so hideous that he himself was frightened at the sound of his own voice. And then red fires gleamed before his eyes, and it seemed to him that the soldiers were hurling stones at him; and the fires each instant grew brighter and brighter, and the weight of the stones grew



each moment more and more crushing. He made one mad effort to thrust the stones from him and to drag himself away; but he could no longer see or hear, he could no longer even think or feel. He was killed on the spot by a jagged splinter that struck him full in the breast."

The foregoing passage, after carefully comparing three different translations, one of which was by way of the French (this latter is the one that Mr. Howells has a brief introduction for, in a volume published by the Harpers), I have given in the English form which Charles Edward Turner supplies in his interesting monograph, "Count Tolstoy as Novelist and Thinker." Mr. Turner is named, on his title-page, "English Lector in the University of St. Petersburg." He may therefore be supposed a competent Russian scholar. The comparison of the three different translations led me to feel that Tolstoy must suffer not a little from the necessity of being, for foreign readers, taken out of his native Russian. It deserves to be noted in passing that, until very lately, to reach the English reader, "War and Peace" had its wine twice decanted—and not, one judges, with very "neat-handed" skill—from the *amphora* of text in which it was by the author originally stored. From the Russian it was first translated into French, to be from French then translated into English. There must be something highly vital in writing which could suffer such handling and still survive in such power. It is curious, by the way, that so lately as 1879 a writer in the *Nineteenth Century*, writing of Tolstoy, should have made the mistake of saying:

"Neither of these works ["War and Peace" and 'Karénina'] seems likely to be translated into English."

## VI

It is a pity that one can not go endlessly on, as the author himself does, and make a paper of some proportionate length for the display of Tolstoy's quality. "War and Peace" fills two volumes of about eight hundred ample pages each—a very long novel certainly, and one such that the mere novel-reader might supposably find it even tedious. There is no all-harmonizing unity of plot to it. It often moves without seeming to move on. It moves in many separate currents in as many separate channels. Your voyage is interrupted by frequent portages. You now and again suppose yourself making advances on the main stream, only to find at length that you had been sailing into a cove having no outlet, and that consequently you have made no distance on your true course. Characters with unpronounceable Russian names file innumerable into the story, and then file out again—to disappear, some of them, without having contributed perceivably to bring about anything essential to the action. The enormous breadth of the canvas which Tolstoy employs for his picture, may be guessed from a census of the personages represented. "War and Peace" would supply, I suppose, at least five hundred distinct and discriminated characters—I actually set down and counted about two hundred within less than half of the book. Among them were three emperors, while kings, princes, generals, and various personages of high degree jostle one another on many and many a page. Incidents occur such that, naturally, if you are unaccustomed to Tolstoy, you expect them to have an

important bearing on the progress of the narrative; but they turn out to be literally mere incidents—that is, they fall upon the story without entering into it. The result of all is that you feel played with, cheated, disappointed. You are interested again and again, but your interest is intermittent, not continuous. There is really nothing in the novel to draw you irresistibly on, curious to see how the plot will work itself out. There seems, in fact, to be no plot to work itself out. This absence of discoverable plot makes it impossible for you to read “War and Peace” satisfactorily by judicious skipping. It is not at all the final goal which is important with Tolstoy; it is the way to the goal. And it is not as a way to a goal, but simply as a way. Tolstoy’s interest is, as yours also must come to be, in the journey, not in the arrival.

No wonder if you give up altogether the reading of such a novel. But call it not a novel, but a book; a book of human life—a book like human life in having its false starts, its waste wanderings, its chance contacts, its barren incidents, its absence of apparent plan—call it such and, thus reading it for what it is instead of for what it is not, you will perhaps come gradually to feel that in Tolstoy’s “War and Peace” you have found something really “epoch-making” in your intellectual experience.

Manifestly such a claim as I have made on behalf of Tolstoy is one incapable of being justified within the bounds of a paper like the present. The claim must necessarily be submitted to the judgment of individual readers who have become acquainted at large for themselves with this Russian writer’s works.

## VII

SOME, at least, of those who read what I here set down will wish, and rightly, to have an expression from the critic on a point concerning Tolstoy, more truly vital than any that has thus far been considered. They will wish to know what I have to say as to the ethical quality of Tolstoy's writings. Under a sense of the most serious personal responsibility for my utterance, I will try to be frankly faithful to all the grave interests involved in the question thus raised.

Some time ago, in discussing the literary and the ethical quality of George Eliot's novels, I laid stress on the distinction to be made in this regard between the motive of the author and the tendency of his works. I then found George Eliot's moral motive to be good, while her unmeant moral influence, on the contrary, was injurious. A similar discrimination might, if necessary, be made in the case of Tolstoy. For, whatever the moral influence of this writer may be, whether wholesome or baleful, it seems to me unquestionable that the motive of the man is sound and sweet. The discrimination indicated might, I say, be thus made in Tolstoy's case—if necessary. But for myself I do not think it necessary. Tolstoy's moral influence, as well as his moral purpose, I hold to be good and not evil.

This opinion of mine does not, of course, go to the extent of approving everything in the way of moral sentiment that Tolstoy expresses or implies. It certainly does not go to the extent of approving the taste and the judgment of some things in him. His stand-



ard of morality is not altogether my own. His standard of delicacy is different. This latter is Continental, Russian perhaps, rather than Anglo-Saxon and American. But, with due allowances made for minor exceptions, I believe that the balance of moral impression likely to be made by Tolstoy is decisively on the right side. This, no matter what class of readers be considered. Still, I should counsel some discrimination in choosing from among Tolstoy's books for recommending to young readers. "Anna Karénina," for example—though in purpose on the author's part, and in probable eventual effect no less on any reader, a pure and noble book—is yet not exactly such a novel as I should think well to put an inexperienced young person upon reading. I sincerely believe indeed that whoever reads the book will be strengthened by it, rather than weakened, for the maintenance of personal purity and virtue. But absolute, unsophisticated ignorance of sin in the world, *where this state of mind really exists and can be preserved*, is, as I maintain, the very best of all possible conditions for anybody and everybody. By no means cut this period short for anybody by a gratuitous, premature introduction to evil arranged even for the purpose of so the better guarding against future possible temptation. It is only in cases in which temptation is likely to be encountered that the proverb holds, "Forewarned is forearmed." Except for such cases, I repeat, mere unsuspecting innocence is better, far better, than the dreadful risk through which virtue exercised and breathed must be bought. Still, notwithstanding that, I firmly believe, and I am ready to say, that not for any mind, old or young, male or female, is there

moral contamination to be feared from Tolstoy's fiction—except such contamination, if such contamination there be, as consists solely in being confronted with vice—to recognize it and to abhor it. I set this down with confidence—in full present regard of the fact that Tolstoy's Continental taste and sense of delicacy permitted him in the original text of "Anna Karénina" to descend, in the description of sensual vice, to details that American editing has thought wise to retrench in the English translation. The passages retrenched I have not myself read. They may be in shockingly bad taste, but they could hardly, as I take it, change from good to evil the pervasive moral character of the entire book. The whole drift and tenor of the novel in question cries out a lie upon the man who represents it as either in purpose or in effect a pander to impurity.

### VIII

I AM going here to present in condensation, and of course in severance by vivisection from its vital continuity in the context, thus doing it unavoidable serious wrong, Tolstoy's description, in "War and Peace," of a certain opera, and of a series of incidents connected with a certain representation of that opera. It is perhaps a strange, perhaps even an unworthy, use that I shall thus make of a passage so instinct as a whole with extraordinary power of conception and of representation; but I present this passage in extract simply for the sake of afterward asking two questions for the thoughtful reader in view of the passage to

answer. I must explain that the chapter from which I take my extracts achieves what beforehand one would have pronounced an impossible feat. It takes a charming young girl, represented as just then in the flush of sincere passionate longing for an absent lover, and this girl in the course of a single evening it perverts into the false and foolish captive of another man, and that man an empty-headed, hollow-hearted villain—so bringing about the sinister change that not only do you not feel the change, horrible as it is, to be improbable even, much less violent, but—more incredible still—you do not lose your sentiment of respect, though you mingle it with pity and with lively blame, for the guilty young deluded victim of the sorcery. The victim is that same Natacha whom the reader has already met in an extract from “War and Peace” in a preceding part of this essay. (For this long extract I use the new translation made directly into English from Russian by Nathan Haskell Dole, and published lately by T. Y. Crowell & Company. Readers will here have to grow accustomed to different forms for the same Russian names.)

“By this time the last notes of the overture were heard, and the baton of the kapellmeister rapped upon the stand. Those gentlemen who were in late slipped down to their places, and the curtain rose.

“As soon as the curtain went up, silence reigned in the parterre and the boxes, and all the gentlemen, young and old, whether in uniforms or in civilian’s dress, and all the ladies, with precious stones glittering on their bare bosoms, with eager expectation turned their attention to the stage.

“Natasha also tried to look.

“Smooth boards formed the center of the stage, on the sides stood painted canvases representing trees, in the background a

cloth was stretched out on boards, in the foreground girls in red bodices and white petticoats were sitting around. One, who was exceedingly stout, wore a white silk dress. She sat by herself on a low footstool, to the back of which was glued green cardboard. They were all singing something. After they had finished their chorus, the girl in white advanced toward the prompter's box, and a man in silk tights on his stout legs, and with a feather and a dagger, joined her, and began to sing and wave his arms.

"The man in the tights sang alone, then she sang, then they were both silent. The orchestra played, and the man began to turn down the fingers on the girl's hand, evidently waiting for the beat when they should sing their parts together. They sang a duet, and then all in the audience began to clap and to shout, and the man and woman on the stage, who had been representing lovers, got up, smiling and letting go of hands, and bowed in all directions.

"After her country life, and the serious frame of mind into which Natasha had lately fallen, all this seemed to her wild and strange. She was unable to follow the thread of the opera, and it was as much as she could do to listen to the music. She saw only painted canvas and oddly dressed men and women going through strange motions, talking, and singing in a blaze of light. She knew what all this was meant to represent, but it all struck her as so affected, unnatural, and absurd that some of the time she felt ashamed for the actors, and again she felt like laughing at them.

"She looked around at the faces of the spectators, to see if she could detect in them any of this feeling of ridicule and perplexity which she felt; but all these faces were absorbed in what was taking place on the stage, or, as it seemed to Natasha, expressed a hypocritical enthusiasm.

" 'This must be, I suppose, very lifelike,' said Natasha. She kept gazing now at those rows of pomaded heads in the parterre, then at the half-naked women in the boxes, and most of all at her neighbor Ellen, who, as undressed as she could well be, gazed with a faint smile of satisfaction at the stage, not dropping her eyes, conscious of the brilliant light that overflowed the auditorium, and the warm atmosphere, heated by the throng.



"Natasha gradually began to enter into a state of intoxication which she had not experienced for a long time. She had no idea who she was, or where she was, or of what was going on before her. She gazed, and let her thoughts wander at will, and the strangest, most disconnected ideas flashed unexpectedly through her mind. Now she felt inclined to leap upon the edge of the box and sing the aria which the actress had just been singing, then she felt an impulse to tap with her fan a little old man who was sitting not far off, then again to lean over to Ellen and tickle her.

"At one time, when there was a perfect silence on the stage just before the beginning of an aria, the door that led into the parterre near where the Rostofs were seated creaked on its hinges, and a man who came in late was heard passing down to his seat.

"'There goes Kuragin,' whispered Shinshin.

"The Countess Bezukhaya turned her head and smiled at the newcomer. Natasha followed the direction of the Countess Bezukhaya's eyes, and saw an extraordinarily handsome adjutant, who, with an air of extreme self-confidence, but at the same time of good breeding, was just passing by their box.

"This was Anatol Kuragin, whom she had seen and noticed some time before at a ball in Petersburg. He now wore his adjutant's uniform, with epaulet and shoulder-knot. He advanced with a supreme air of youthful gallantry, which would have been ludicrous had he not been so handsome, and had his handsome face not worn such an expression of cordial good-humor and merriment.

"Although it was during the act, he sauntered along the carpeted corridor, slightly jingling his spurs, and holding his perfumed, graceful head on high with easy grace. Glancing at Natasha, he joined his sister, laid his exquisitely gloved hand on the edge of her box, nodded to her, and bent over to ask some question in reference to Natasha.

"'Mais charmante,' said he, evidently referring to her. She understood less from hearing his words than from the motion of his lips.

"Then he went forward to the front row and took his seat near Dolokhof, giving him a friendly, careless nudge with his elbow, though the others treated him with such worshipful con-

sideration. The other, with a merry lifting of the eyebrows, gave him a smile, and put up his foot against the railing.

“‘How like brother and sister are!’ said the count; ‘and how handsome they both are!’

“Shinshin, in an undertone, began to tell the count some story about Kuragin’s intrigues in Moscow, to which Natasha listened simply because he had spoken of her as *charmante*.

“The first act was over. All in the parterre got up, mingled together, and began to go and come. . . . In the second act the stage represented a cemetery, and there was a hole in the canvas, which represented the moon, and the footlights were turned down, and the horns and contrabasses began to play in very deep tones, and the stage was invaded from both sides by a throng of men in black mantles. These men began to wave their arms, brandishing what seemed to be daggers. Then some other men rushed forward, and proceeded to drag away by main force that damsel who, in the previous act, had been dressed in white, but was now in a blue dress. But before they dragged her away they sang with her for a long time, and at the sound of three thumps on something metallic behind the scenes all fell on their knees and began to sing a prayer. A number of times all these actions were interrupted by the enthusiastic plaudits of the spectators. Every time during this act that Natasha looked down into the parterre she saw Anatol Kuragin, with his arm carelessly thrown across the back of the seat, and gazing at her. It was pleasant for her to feel that she had so captivated him, and it never entered her head that in all this there was anything improper.

“When the second act was over, the Countess Bezukhaya stood up, leaned over to the Rostofs’ box—thereby exposing her whole bosom—beckoned the old count to come to her, and then, paying no heed to those who came to her box to pay her their homage, she began a smiling, confidential conversation with him.

“‘You must certainly make me acquainted with your charming girls,’ said she; ‘the whole city are talking about them, and I don’t know them.’

“Natasha got up and made a courtesy to this magnificent countess. The flattery of this brilliant beauty was so intoxicating to her that she blushed with pleasure and gratification.

" 'I mean to be a Muscovite also,' said Ellen. 'And aren't you ashamed of yourself to hide such pearls in the country?'

"The Countess Bezukhaya, by good rights, had the reputation of being a fascinating woman. She could say the opposite of what she thought, and could flatter in the most simple and natural manner. . . . She proposed that, in order to become better acquainted, one of the young ladies should come over into her box for the rest of the performance, and Natasha went.

"During the third act the scene represented a palace, wherein many candles were blazing, while on the walls hung paintings representing full-bearded knights. In the center stood, apparently, a tsar and tsaritsa. The tsar was gesticulating with his right hand, and, after singing something with evident timidity, and certainly very wretchedly, he took his seat on a crimson throne.

"The damsel, who at first had been dressed in white and then in blue, wore now nothing but a shift, with disheveled hair, and stood near the throne. She was warbling some doleful ditty addressed to the tsaritsa, but the tsar peremptorily waved his hand, and from the side scenes came a number of bare-legged men and bare-legged women, and began to dance all together.

"Then the fiddles played a very dainty and merry tune. One girl, with big bare legs and thin arms, coming out from among the others, went behind the scenes, and, having adjusted her corsage, came into the center of the stage, and began to caper about and knock her feet together.

"The whole parterre clapped their hands and shouted 'Bravo!'

"Then a man took his stand in one corner. The orchestra played louder than ever, with a clanging of cymbals and blare of horns, and this bare-legged man, alone by himself, began to make very high jumps and kick his feet together. This man was Duport, who earned sixty thousand rubles a year by his art. All in the parterre, in the boxes, and in the 'upper paradise' began to thump and shout with all their might, and the man paused and smiled, and bowed to all sides. Then some others danced—bare-legged men and women; then one of the royal personages shouted something with musical accompaniment, and all began to sing. But suddenly a storm arose. Chromatic scales and diminished sevenths were heard in the orchestra, and

all scattered behind the scenes, carrying off with them again one of those who was present, and the curtain fell.

"Once more among the audience arose a terrible roar and tumult, and all, with enthusiastic faces, shouted at once, 'Duport! Duport! Duport!'

"Natasha no longer looked upon this as strange or unusual. With a sense of satisfaction she looked around her, smiling joyously.

"*'N'est-ce pas qu'il est admirable—Duport?'* asked Ellen, turning to her.

"*'Oh, oui!'* replied Natasha.

"During the *entr'acte* a draft of cold air made its way into Ellen's box, as the door was opened and Anatol came in, bowing and trying not to disturb any one.

"*'Allow me to present my brother,'* said Ellen, uneasily glancing from Natasha to Anatol.

"Natasha turned her pretty, graceful head toward the handsome young man, and smiled at him over her shoulder. Anatol, who was as fine-looking near at hand as he was at a distance, sat down by her, and said that he had been long wishing for the pleasure of her acquaintance—ever since the Naruiskins' ball, where he had seen her, and never forgotten her.

"Kuragin was far cleverer and less affected with women than he was in the society of men. He spoke fluently and simply, and Natasha had a strange and agreeable feeling of ease in the company of this man, about whom so many rumors were current. He was not only not terrible, but his face even wore a naive, jolly, and good-natured smile.

"Kuragin asked her how she enjoyed the play, and told her how Semyonova, at the last performance, had got a fall while on the stage.

"*'Do you know, countess,'* said he, suddenly addressing her as though she were an old acquaintance, *'we have been arranging a fancy-dress party. You ought to take part in it. It will be very jolly. We shall all rendezvous at the Karagins'. Please come, won't you?'* he insisted.

"In saying this he did not once take his smiling eyes from her face, her neck, her naked arms. Natasha was not left in doubt of the fact that he admired her. This was agreeable, but some-



how she felt constrained and troubled by his presence. When she was not looking at him, she was conscious that he was staring at her shoulders, and she involuntarily tried to catch his eyes, so that he might rather fix them on her face. But while she thus looked him in the eyes, she had a terrified consciousness that that barrier of modesty, which, she had always felt before, kept other men at a distance, was down between him and her. Without being in the least able to explain it, she was conscious within five minutes that she was on a dangerously intimate footing with this man. She nervously turned a little, for fear he might put his hand on her bare arm, or kiss her on the neck. They talked about the simplest matters, and yet she felt that they were more intimate than she had ever been with any other man. She looked at Ellen and at her father, as though asking them what all this meant; but Ellen was busily engaged in conversation with some general, and paid no heed to her imploring look, and her father's said nothing more to her than what it always said: 'Happy? Well, I am glad of it.'

"During one of those moments of constraint, while Anatol's prominent eyes were calmly and boldly surveying her, Natasha, in order to break the silence, asked him how he liked Moscow. Natasha asked the question and blushed. It seemed to her all the time that she was doing something unbecoming in talking with him. Anatol smiled, as though to encourage her.

"'At first I was not particularly charmed with Moscow, because what a city ought to have, to be agreeable, is pretty women; isn't that so? Well, now I like it very much,' said he, giving her a significant look. 'Will you come to our party, countess? Please do,' said he; and, stretching out his hand toward her bouquet and lowering his voice, he added in French, 'You will be the prettiest. Come, my dear countess, and, as a pledge, give me that flower.'

"Natasha did not realize what he was saying any more than he did, but she had a consciousness that in his incomprehensible words there was an improper meaning. She knew not what reply to make, and turned away, pretending not to have heard him. But the instant that she turned away the thought came to her that he was there behind her, and so near.

"'What is he doing now? Is he ashamed of himself? Is he

angry? Is it my business to make amends?' she asked herself. She could not refrain from glancing round.

"She looked straight into his eyes, and his nearness and self-possession, and the good-natured warmth of his smile, overcame her.

"She gave him an answering smile, and gazed straight into his eyes, and once more she realized, with the feeling of horror, that there was no barrier between them.

"The curtain again went up. Anatol left the box, calm and serene. Natasha rejoined her father in her own box, but already she was under the dominion of this world into which she had entered. Everything that passed before her eyes now seemed to her perfectly natural, while all her former thoughts concerning her lover, and the Princess Mariya, and her life in the country, vanished from her mind as though all that had taken place long, long ago.

"In the fourth act there was a strange kind of devil, who sang and gesticulated until a trap beneath him was opened, and he disappeared. This was all that Natasha noticed during the fourth act. Something agitated and disturbed her, and the cause of this annoyance was Kuragin, at whom she could not help looking.

"When they left the theater Anatol joined them, summoned their carriage, and helped them to get seated. As he was assisting Natasha, he squeezed her arm above the elbow. Startled and blushing, she looked at him. His brilliant eyes returned her gaze, and he gave her a tender smile.

"Not until she reached home was Natasha able clearly to realize all that had taken place, and when she suddenly remembered Prince Andrei she was horror-struck; and as they all sat drinking tea she groaned aloud, and, flushing scarlet, ran from the room.

"'My God! I am lost,' she said to herself. 'How could I have let it go so far?' she wondered. Long she sat hiding her flushed face in her hands, striving to give herself a clear account of what had happened to her, and she could not do so, nor could she explain her feelings. Everything seemed to her dark, obscure, and terrible.

"Then, in that huge, brilliant auditorium, where Duport, with his bare legs and his spangled jacket, capered about on the dampened stage to the sounds of music, and the girls and the old men and Ellen, much *décolletée*, with her calm and haughty smile, were all applauding and enthusiastically shouting bravo —there, under the protection of this same Ellen, everything was perfectly clear and simple; but now, alone by herself, it became incomprehensible."

## IX

I HAVE made an extract in proportion almost unprecedentedly long. It seemed necessary. To the wise reader of these pages, such an extract will be more enlightening than any amount of the justest and the most penetrative criticism could be, in the lack of opportunity to see, in a specimen of some length, the original text of the author. I did what I could through retrenchment to shorten the passage quoted; but it proved irreducibly long, after all. I have read it over and over and over again, in the prolonged act of choosing and deciding; and at every successive reading, it has gained upon me in impression of intellectual and moral power. I wish I could be sure of persuading my readers to do the same in the way of repeated perusal; I should then be sure of their experiencing the same impression in result.

Against strong temptation, I refrained from interrupting the passage with remarks of my own to point out what seemed to me touches of peculiar power, profounder glimpses of insight, frequent throughout its course. I did not forget the purpose with which I had proposed the extract; namely, that of asking certain questions concerning it.

The questions, then, that I wish to ask of the thoughtful reader of the foregoing passage from Tolstoy, are these:

1. What was the moral attitude, the moral state of mind, the moral purpose, of the author? Was it one of sympathy with sin? Was it one of indifference to sin? Was it not rather one of vehement elemental antipathy to sin?

2. What is the natural effect of the passage quoted on the mind, the heart, the conscience, the character, of the reader? Is it to make dalliance with temptation seem a light thing, or even possibly a delightful? Is it not rather to make such dalliance seem, as it is, a dreadful thing, and a deadly? Would a pure young girl reading it have her imagination titillated with suggestion of evil desire? Would she not rather experience an irresistible recoil from possible like weakness and fault in herself? Would she not afterward be safer, rather than less safe, against the possible approaches of villainy triangulating, with sinister siege intention, to undermine her virtue unaware? Would she not know better both the masculine devil, *whom she is never certain of not meeting*, and the insecurity of her own heart?

For my own part, I should not know where to go in quest of a more searching, more penetrating, more effective, exposure of the vanity, the falseness, the essential vulgarity and unwholesomeness of the Spectacle, its ridiculousness, its monstrous, its irredeemable absurdity as well—mercilessly exposed in that humorous disillusioning by mere literalness of description; and where is there to be found an unmasking more complete of the arts of the high-bred pan-



deress and of the sensualist son of Belial? Never, it may safely be said, was deadlier satire, never satire exercised more severely, more entirely, in the service of virtue. "War and Peace" was written by Tolstoy many years ago, before therefore he had fully awaked to the consciousness of his mission as a teacher, but he was already then a knight sworn by nature among the lovers and defenders of purity. The very excesses of his own youth had revolted him to virtue.

A newspaper critic, one with whose spirit and with whose judgment I have frequently been delighted to find myself in accord, grown mistakenly indignant against Tolstoy, asked once, with an air of demonstration: "Who can quote him? What American magazine would dare publish a literal, out-and-out translation of . . . 'War and Peace'?" My readers may safely judge the matter for themselves, for in my own quotations they have already seen quite the worst, or, better to express it, the superficially most objectionable, that "War and Peace" contains. I have diligently sought information from men in this country the most likely to know the truth on this point, and I have been unable to learn that the original text has been seriously tampered with, or indeed, in the way of moral expurgation, tampered with at all, in the process of transfer from Russian to English. That thing most nearly doubtful in "War and Peace" which my readers have just seen, they, in virtue of its segregation from the context, saw at some disadvantage as against Tolstoy—an unavoidable, involuntary unfairness on my own part, which I very imperfectly redress by adding now that Tolstoy provides a noble redemption in the eyes of all for Natacha, in a long ex-

piatory self-devotion, beautifully observed by her toward her true lover while he slowly and pathetically though patiently dies, in sequel of a dreadful wound received on the field of battle.

## X.

BUT the "Kreutzer Sonata"—what of that? Well, of the "Kreutzer Sonata" I am perfectly willing to speak; though I should have felt no special occasion to do so had not the circumstances attending the reception of that book by the public been such that to keep silent concerning it might seem to imply conscious and purposed avoidance on my part of an unsavory subject. Nothing of the sort would be justly imputed. I had indeed written substantially all that precedes before the "Kreutzer Sonata" was published. But had the "Kreutzer Sonata" been published before I wrote, I should still have written quite the same as I have done, except perhaps to have written one particular thing, not very important, more confidently than I did. There is nothing in that little book to change in the least my estimate of Tolstoy. My estimate of him has, at one point, a point of denial to him, been incidentally confirmed—that is all. I said at the beginning of the present paper that perfect balance of judgment was the one thing wanting to Tolstoy's marvelous mental equipment. The "Kreutzer Sonata" betrays this lack, and nothing more really needs to be said on the subject. But I am willing to say something more. I am willing to say that, at the same time that the "Kreutzer Sonata" illustrates Tolstoy's

lack of perfect soundness in judgment, it illustrates also his frankness, his sincerity, his earnestness, his courage, his love of purity (almost a fanaticism with Tolstoy), his generous desire to purify his fellow men, and, finally, the tendency of his moral teaching zeal to consume the artist motive in him. For the "Kreutzer Sonata" is, artistically considered, one of the very least satisfactory among Tolstoy's productions.

In connection with this allusion to the "Kreutzer Sonata," I may very well show my readers what a witty satirist, Robert Buchanan, once, with singularly mingled injustice and justice, said in verse about Tolstoy. Under the title, "The Dismal Throng," Mr. Buchanan treats of the noisome and gruesome group of contemporary pessimistic realists in fiction. He immensely exaggerates Tolstoy's fault of taste in admitting coarseness into his work—this apparently for the sake of the point so to be obtained—but, with that exception, the main injustice done by the satirist to the great Russian consists in introducing him at all in such company. The undoubted real motive and spirit of Tolstoy are wisely discerned, as they are also happily put into expression; besides, the comparative intellectual and moral rank of the novelist is candidly recognized:

"There's Tolstoy, towering in his place  
 O'er all the rest by head and shoulders;  
 No sunshine on that noble face  
 Which Nature meant to charm beholders!  
 Mad with his self-made martyr's shirt,  
 Obscene, through hatred of obscenity,  
 He from a pulpit built of Dirt  
 Shrieks his Apocalypse of Cleanness!"

I have never found anywhere in Tolstoy's writings the least sign that impurity of heart or of life was indifferent to him—nay, was other than unchangeably abhorrent. And yet I can, from my own experience, understand how easily the mistake of judging him differently may, even by a candid and intelligent mind, be made. I had several of his books, "Anna Karénina" among them, nearly a year in my house before I overcame, sufficiently to read one of them, the moral revolt inspired by a first dip into "Anna Karénina." I finally forced myself to read that novel, doubting much of my way through its pages. From that I went on to another and another of Tolstoy's works, to arrive at length at the conclusions respecting them which I have here advanced. I trust I have guarded sufficiently the general approbation expressed. Let me repeat that I should not select "Anna Karénina" for recommendation to the reading of the young. But so, for different reasons indeed, I should not select Thackeray's novels for that purpose. Tolstoy might shock more the taste of such readers than would Thackeray, but he would not be at all more likely to weaken in them the love or the instinct of purity. "Anna Karénina" is eminently a book for older readers, for readers of more experience. To no reader, however, is it, in my opinion, a morally dangerous book.

Of Tolstoy as a religionist, I do not undertake more than passingly to speak. He is in this character at once a most stimulating companion and a most untrustworthy guide. His artistic fault here is that he lets his intemperate didactic and propagandist zeal involve his exposition in endless cycles of movement without



progress, of repetition in which emphasis effaces itself by becoming incessant. He would inspire more confidence in his reader if he had somewhat less confidence in himself. He writes as if, dissatisfied with what he had previously done, he entered upon his treatment of his subject every morning afresh from the very beginning. In this respect he, as religious autobiographer and expositor, resembles Burke writing his interminable, unanalyzed, undistributed, inspired, passionate "Reflections on the French Revolution." He would even be tedious to read if he were not so intensely convinced and so eloquently in earnest. In Biblical exegesis he is as certain as if he knew. He does know what he wishes to find, and he finds it. It is his sense of release from obligation to *learn* that misleads him. He feels only, or he feels overmasteringly, the obligation to teach. He selects a few, six in number, of the precepts of Jesus, and interpreting these with the most rigorous literalness, in complete disregard of other precepts of the same Master which should limit and balance them, makes them constitute the sum and substance of Christianity. What Tolstoy lacks for soundness and roundness of religious character is, a profound personal experience of Jesus—of Jesus not as a wise, even the wisest, moral philosopher and teacher—as such he sincerely confesses Him—but as absolutely authoritative Lord and Master, as the Son of God, as the Savior of the world.

Of Tolstoy as social and political theorist, much the same praise, much the same caution, must be spoken. Read him—with open, but with judging, mind and conscience and heart. You will be quickened to your inmost core—quickened, illuminated, purified, helped.

You will be inspired to admire and to love the man, perhaps to pray for him that the kindly light may yet lead him on to the full knowledge of that Truth whom now, perhaps with unconscious self-will, he follows without obeying, and therefore without knowing aright.

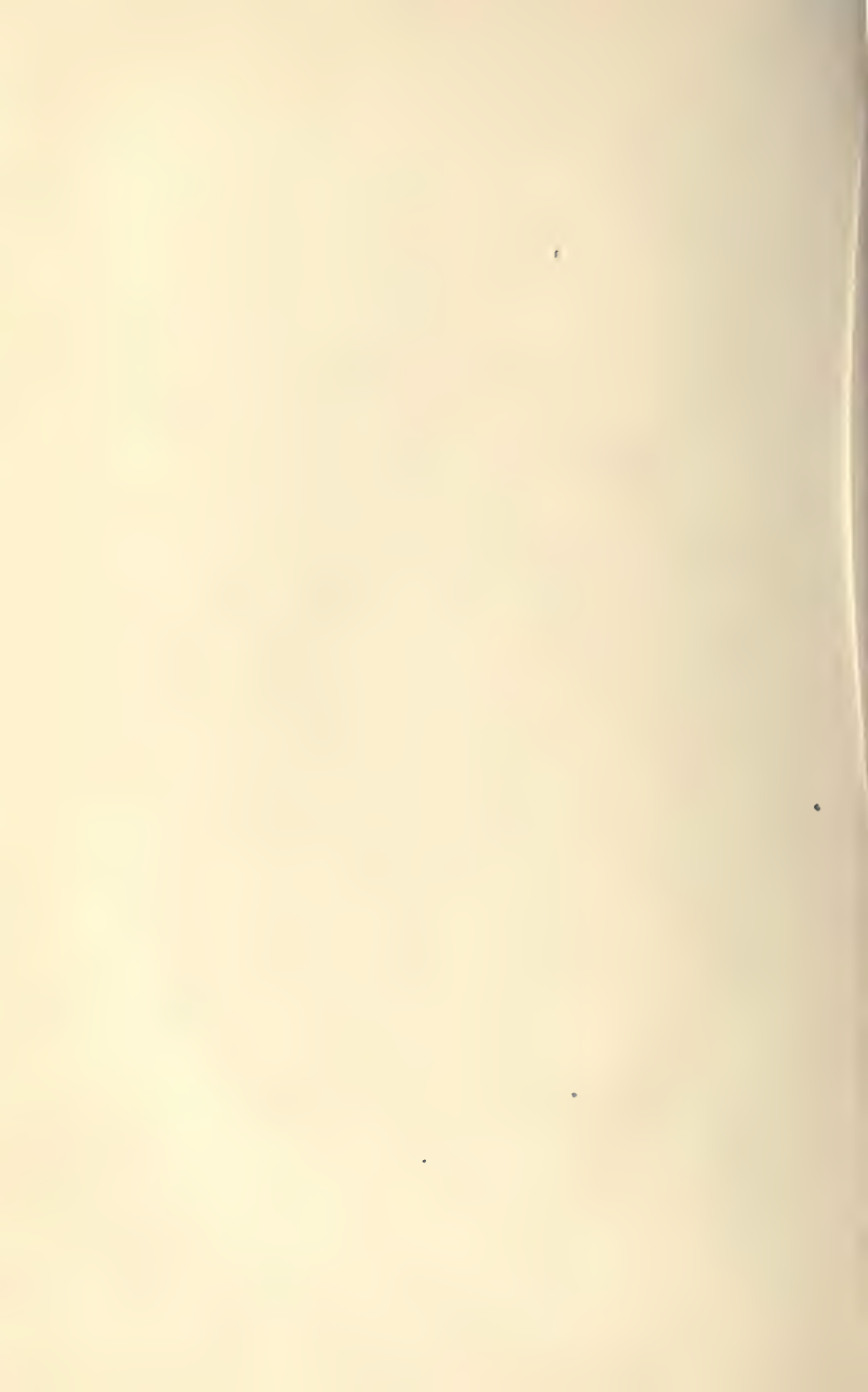
## XI

I HAVE written this very inadequate appreciation of a great author, very famous, yet too little known and too much misunderstood, in the undoubting conviction that I should be rendering a true service in proportion as I might succeed in causing Tolstoy to be more widely, and at the same time more wisely, read. I hope this my conviction will prove to have been as sound as it was strongly and conscientiously held.



## APPENDIX





## ALEXANDER SMITH'S "LIFE DRAMA"

[THE following paper is shown in appendix, to illustrate pp. 35, 36 preceding. It was written in the author's youth—in fact, before he entered college as a freshman. Later, a few concluding sentences were added by him to give it a finish and make it presentable as a required exercise before the college literary society of which he was a member. Manifestly the magisterial tone of it was furnished to the writer by the style of review article at the time in fashion. This tone was, of course, very misbecoming in so young a writer, who, however, when writing his criticism, conceived his age as masked by the anonymity of the quarterly review. I now shorten the article by omissions here and there.

No one can feel more keenly, no one can condemn more strongly, than I do the overflowing lack of amenity that characterizes this juvenile criticism of mine. It was, and evidently it was intended to be, a mercilessly "slashing" review, patterned, for aught I know, after Macaulay on Robert Montgomery. I am now glad to observe some signs of relenting toward Alexander Smith appearing at the close of the criticism.

It is curious, by the way, and it shows the extraordinary prestige and ascendancy immediately commanded by the "Life Drama," that Herbert Spencer, in his "Philosophy of Style," cites from it a certain

phrase with all homage, as toward a recognized classic to illustrate his teaching—"a fine instance," he says, "among the many which that poem contains." Some readers will at least be interested in the bits of the poem preserved in the present criticism.

It may be added that Alexander Smith's short term of life enjoyed after the publication of his first most noteworthy book, was filled with fruitful literary activity. A volume of essays in prose entitled "Dreamthorp" had, as I remember it, real merit. Time has wreaked an unduly severe revenge upon this fame, for the suddenness and the brilliancy with which it first burst upon the world.]

WE trusted there was an end of this sort. We were fain to believe there had been infused into the public taste by the prophet labors of Coleridge, and the ethereal inspirations of Wordsworth and Tennyson, such a leaven as had worked it forever too pure to receive a proffer like this. We knew Byron continued to be read, but supposed the well-trained skill of the reader to separate the honey deprived his poison of a measure of its power. But we falter—we hesitate—we doubt. This volume of poems and its reception stagger us. A salmagundi—a hodgepodge—to equal which all the rantings, and crudities, and profanities possible to be skimmed from the fermenting caldron of Byron were as nothing, and scarcely tempered with a particle of his preservative salt, is tolerated not only, but pronounced, in some of its parts, authentically Shakespearian. It is reproduced here by the elegant American publishers of Tennyson, in uniform style with him, and bought by more than five thousand American readers in less than three months. [Ten thousand copies were sold in a very short time.] This is the phenomenon. But are we really a public of so bad

taste? A little inquiry into the history of the book will help us out with this question. Besides some of the great quarterlies, sundry tributary gorges supplied their utmost to swell the tide of eulogy, which, it can not be denied, received also some purer feeders. Now precisely so far as these influences suffice to carry it, this book will go; when they ebb, it will be left in the ooze.

“A Life Drama” is the title of the leading one of these poems, and, so far as the ill manner of its compounding goes a just exponent of the sophomoric and unnatural character of the whole. An insane misanthrope, named Walter, is the principal *dramatis persona*, and the first introduced. He enters reading a scroll he has been writing. We learn he wrote it from the stage direction at top. We think it important, however—and hereby give Mr. Smith the benefit of the suggestion—that before the play is presented, this should be made to appear from the course of the deliverance itself—both because an artistic defect would thus be removed, and because otherwise Walter might easily be mistaken for an excited actor committing his part, especially as he very soon tears his paper, and proceeds, with extreme vehemence, without notes. Of course this latter strain is in reality an extempore performance, but assuming the hypothesis of the actor, which we insist is more plausible the more we think of it, it would naturally be regarded as the triumph of conclusive memory. Walter sings and says:

“As a wild maiden, with love-drinking eyes  
 Sees in sweet dreams a beaming Youth of Glory,  
 And wakes to weep, and ever after sighs  
 For that bright vision till her hair is hoary;  
 Even so, alas! is my life’s passion-story.  
 For Poesy my heart and pulses heat,  
 For Poesy my blood runs red and fleet,  
 As Moses’ serpent the Egyptians’ swallowed,  
 One passion eats the rest. My soul is followed  
 By strong ambition to outroll a lay,  
 Whose melody will haunt the world for aye,  
 Charming it onward on its golden way.”



Thus far by Walter from manuscript. Forgetting the barbarism of "outrolling" a lay, so singularly discordant in a strain evidently designed to please wholly by its inoffensive pace, we presume there are tastes inexperienced enough to admire the last two or three pretty meaningless verses. As to the preceding, we submit, the image contained in the first quatrain is copied from Byron, who touches it thus:

"a dream of love,  
Shaped by some solitary nymph, whose breast  
Longed for a deathless lover from above,  
And maddened in that vision."

"Bare, bald, and tawdry as a fingered moth  
Is my poor life."

says Walter, and, according to Mr. Smith's admirers, we strike upon the true Shakespearian ore at once. Now if Shakespearian at all, this is too Shakespearian; but differs in such a way from Shakespeare's "stale, flat, and unprofitable" as to suggest only the contrast between the morbid, futile efforts of fevered fingers and the calm grasp of a master hand. Considered by itself, positively, what is it worth? "Bare" and "bald," so far as they respect the subject, are precise equivalents, and "tawdry," is a polar contradiction of both. The "fingered moth" is a cruel suggestion, and cruel suggestions poetry spurns, save in very rare needs; but what makes a moth *tawdry*, unless it be the dust, here represented as "fingered" from its tender wings?

"As well may some wild maiden waste her love  
Upon the calm front of a marble Jove,"

is one of Walter's many admired attempts to show how utterly it wouldn't pay to address his suit to Poesy. For our part, we do not think his "wild maiden" will ever figure to please us, after two such presentations.

It is not long before Walter becomes conscious of

"A heart to hew his name out upon time,  
As on a rock, then, in immortalness,  
To stand on time as on a pedestal."

We never heard of "immortalness" before; it may be some sort of statuary material peculiarly appropriate to the design. If so, the meaning of the expression "in immortalness" is perfectly clear; it is, with a difference, as if it had been "in bronze"; otherwise it is a verse-filler. At all events, if Walter ever succeeds in accomplishing his unexampled feat, we have this assurance at least—the "pedestal" will be labeled, and we shall know who the statue is.

Walter proceeds two or three verses, and caps again by saying he "wears within his soul"

"A pang as fierce as Dives, drowsed with wine,  
Lipping his leman in luxurious dreams,  
Waked by a fiend in hell."

And this Alexander Smith afterward talks of "hallowing poetry to God"!

"'Tis not for me, ye Heavens! 'tis not for me,  
To fling a poem, like a comet out," etc.

What have we here? Is it anything but impotent rant? What interest is it conceivable the "Heavens" should have in a man who owns without reserve that it isn't for him, etc.? In point of fact, however, he is undoubtedly right; it clearly isn't for him.

In the connection of the "comet," Walter speaks of those "wonderful mysterious voids"—an expression, by the way, wonderful mysteriously void of everything but pregnant suggestion of our splendid essays on the starry heavens written in our academical days—as

"throbbing with stars like pulses."

Tennyson has a marvelous "cry"

"that shivered to the tingling stars,"

which is very high poetry indeed, while Mr. Smith's intimation is most disagreeable. Need we define our-

selves? The passages are both boldly figurative, and resemble each other in attributing to the stars emotion, or at least sensation, proper only to animate objects. (Mr. Smith's line, perhaps, has metaphor within metaphor, the "voids" being represented as "throbbing" *with* the stars, which are to them as pulses; but we treat the metaphor to be considered as extricated.) The cry, in Tennyson, goes shuddering up the ringing arches of the clear, frosty sky, and, reaching the stars, which the simultaneous fancy of the poet endows with such susceptibility, causes them to tingle in their still spaces. A fine, delicate, almost spiritual, emotion. Its phenomenon might be a minute, infinitesimal vibration of the chords of being. It consists therefore perfectly with our notions of the absolute spotlessness of those fair appearances, which, with a not unpleasing play of fancy, one calls "the poetry of heaven." "Throbbing," on the contrary, our every instinct of taste rejects as a tumult too passionate and gross for their experience. Another consideration aggravates Mr. Smith's irreverence. His figure represents "throbbing" as an ordinary and habitual condition of the stars. "Tingling," let it be noticed, is but occasional, and altogether contingent in Tennyson. Mr. Smith repeats his sin through all the equally displeasing variations of "palpitating," "beating," "panting," etc. This somewhat lengthened stricture sufficiently indicates the canons of taste which condemn the greater part of the book. Hereafter we shall remark upon our citations in the briefest manner.

Walter, to illustrate the vanity of trying to secure a single glance from Fame, says that even so tries

"Some lonely wonderer 'mong the desert sands  
By shouts to gain the notice of the Sphinx  
Staring right on with calm, eternal eyes."

And thus closes, rather grandly, Scene First.

It would protract this essay in criticism to an unpardonable length or we should like to continue this

running commentary to the end of the poem. There is scarcely a passage which does not suggest an original somewhere in English poetry. But we must confine ourselves to the notice of a few of the most salient points and bring this paper to its close.

In Scene Second, Walter gets asleep, under a tree in the forest, with a book of poetry by his side, and is surprised in that situation by a young lady who exclaims at his beauty, declares his eyes, judging from the eyelids, "must be a sight," and has the boldness and bad taste to open the book, whereupon a manuscript falls out, and she reads it. This done, the poet wakes up, and the two commence a most extraordinary conversation. The poet assures her that he is himself nothing whatever in comparison with a deceased friend of his whose touching history then recited reminds her of an "old, low strain" ("old, sad song"—*Shakespeare*) that she proceeds to sing without waiting for an invitation. Walter, not to be outdone, in return renders a strain of his departed bard. The strain must have been a terrible one, and it is not to be wondered at that the bard departed. He premises two or three pages, however, to inspire a personal interest in the bard.

"Men said, This dawn  
Will widen to a clear and boundless day;  
And when it ripens to a sumptuous West  
With a great sunset, 'twill be closed and crowned."

Here one and the same "dawn" is made to "widen" indefinitely, to "ripen" to a West, which is sumptuous, then to be shut, and finally to be crowned with a tremendous great big sunset! Did ever dawn enter on such a program before? Walter is willing to depreciate himself in any reasonable degree to magnify his friend:

"He was the sun; I was that *squab* the earth."

"Once did he say,"



"My friend! a poet must ere long arise  
 And with a regal song sun-crown this age,  
 As a saint's head is with a halo crowned."

These three lines unmistakably indicate to what we are indebted for Mr. Smith's poem. It is the forced growth of an unhealthy imagination heated by the incessant canting of reviews for years past on the instant demand of this prosy generation for a great poet to set its developments to music. A young man of excitable temperament who has read the poets a good deal and the periodicals more is fired with a generous, though rather Quixotic, ambition to remove the reproach of the age. This is the secret, and the whole secret, of this production. There is nothing natural or healthful in it. One might dream it for all its freshness and truthfulness. Well, the demand was fictitious; why should it not meet a spurious supply? The singular irreverence toward Tennyson implied in the prophecy of a great poet yet to come, sufficiently proves the blindness or the falsity of the prophets and lessens our surprise at their eager and inconsiderate acceptance of Alexander Smith as a plenary fulfilment. Regarded from the standpoint we have indicated, this poem appears in its true colors—as the sickly offspring of a distempered and overheated fancy. We see in it nature everywhere misinterpreted, and the bountiful contributions levied on the poets unpoetized and debased.

"In the ripe full-blown season of his soul,"  
 reminds of the lusty "Comus" of Milton,

"Who, ripe and frolic of his full-grown age,"

—did various things whereof here needs no account. The word "ripe" as used by Mr. Smith introduces the image of fruit, while "full-blown" following reverses the order of nature and takes us back to the flower. This bard's words had the singular effect to ignite Walter, or, as he expresses it, "set him on fire." Just

here he grasped Walter's hand, and Walter very properly looking at him (in his peculiar way, no doubt):

"A thought struck all the blood into his cheek."

We commend this to the attention of the faculty. Cases accumulate. Tennyson, we remember, was similarly affected when striving to speak in Elysium. He describes the symptoms to have been

"As when a great thought strikes along the brain  
And flushes all the cheek."

"Ringed by his weeping lords."—*Smith*.

"Watched by weeping queens."—*Tennyson*.

Walter finally enters upon his song whose very van is horrid with profanities. In the sacred measure of "Locksley Hall" are uttered such crudities and grossnesses as it seems to us no true poet could by any possibility conceive. In the line,

"Watch the lightnings dart like swallows round the *brooding thunder-eaves*."

who does not recognize a disintegrated feature of Tennyson's magnificent landscape?

"And one a full-fed river winding slow  
By herds upon an endless plain;  
*The ragged rims of thunder brooding low*  
With shadow-streaks of rain."

The measure is a weird and phantom one—how abysmally contemptible such punnish conceits as the following:

"You should give the world, she murmured, such delicious thoughts as these.

They are fit to line portmanteaus. Nay, she whispered, memories."

Passing on, we have the sunset west construed into the "barren beach of hell at ebb of tide." The angry sun again is

"Stern as the unlash'd eye of God!"

"Brow-bound with gold."—*Smith*.

"Brow-bound with burning gold."—*Tennyson*.

We always experience an indescribable disposition to expectorate in reading this passage. The "wretched west" is said to "hold"

"the sunset's corpse  
Spit on, insulted by the brutal rains."

"Kings might kneel beneath her stare,"

the "stare" of a maiden "queenly fair"! This excerpt is from a string of stanzas, whose meter is that of "The Two Voices," mutilated by the loss of a foot from each verse. Are the verbal and rhymic identities in the two following quotations mere chance coincidences?

"Her blue eye so mild and meek  
She uplifteth when I speak:  
Lo! the blushes mount her cheek."—*Smith*.

"His lips are very mild and meek;  
Though one should smite him on the cheek,  
And on the mouth, he will not speak."—*Tennyson*.

### A lady is introduced

"up whose cheek blushes went  
As thick and frequent as the streamers pass  
Up cold December nights."

This doubtless has been widely admired as an original and very striking image. But it is murdered in Mr. Smith's very happiest vein from Tennyson where he says:

"On her pallid cheek and forehead came a color and a light  
As I have seen the rosy red flushing in the northern night."

An obvious appropriation—but observe how, in making the transfer, Mr. Smith has utterly failed to transfer the volatile essence of fitness to his comparison. Now, as all know, the northern lights are every

whit as capricious and varying in their apparition as blushes, and so afford no idea of the number or frequency of the latter, which were a low, degrading office at best. Tennyson, in the very *streaming* of his verse, and especially in the exquisite choice of language, paints the silent noise of the crystal jets playing up the sky, and imparts to his subject a transient elevation which is the very crown of poetry.

“And with a strong hand hold the rearing world.”

In connection with a metaphor so ridiculous as this, which transforms the whole world into a rampant horse, we hesitate to suggest Tennyson’s

“wrestling thews that throw the world,”

which is undoubtedly its original. The vagueness and abstraction of the latter intimate a notion which is readily admitted by all without being defined by anybody; but the broad platitude of sitting astride a fractious and plunging animal we submit is too much.

A titbit:

“The Devil fisheth best for souls of men  
When his hook is baited with a lovely limb;”

“And one round star shook in the breezy West.”

There is one thing noticeable in the structure of this verse, and that is the artistic introduction of the word “shook.” It is so introduced as to break the iambic monotony, and surprise us with the recoil of a trochee. This peculiarity is what suggests at once the indescribably picturesque and beautiful lines of Tennyson,

“The maiden splendors of the morning star  
Shook in the steadfast blue,”

in which the same circumstance produces the same effect. The effect is evidently lyric, and quite inappropriate to a line of merely descriptive blank verse. But Mr. Smith was describing a very unusual scene, and we are not sure that he should be denied recourse



to a somewhat extraordinary expedient of description. It is not every afternoon that a man sees a star in the West while it is yet glowing orange with the sun. Mr. Smith must have had exceedingly fine opportunities of observation of nature; or he may have telescopic eyes; or still better, if there were such things, as they say stars are to be seen at any time of day from the bottom of a well—we mean if wells were ever sunk with a horizontal declination, and we should not wonder if they were in Mr. Smith's district of country—Mr. Smith wrote that line some warm afternoon in the bottom of a well.

The "Drama" has waxed to scene seventh, and Walter enters rhapsodizing. His theme is Nature full of the life of the later spring; but he utters his deliverances as if they were oracular responses or rather the abrupt laconic commands of a captain in a storm:

"Hedges are white with May."

"White with May"—picturesque, very; but thrust into our faces. More gracefully the true poet and artist does it thus

"The lanes, you know, were white with may."

"The weary sun is *lolling* in the west!"

"We are not always in our *singing robes*"—

*De gustibus non disputandum*, but we prefer it as it stands in full in Milton's prose, "with his garland and singing-ropes about him."

"But Nature never mocks or jeers at one."—*Smith*.

"Knowing that Nature never did betray  
The heart that loved her."—*Wordsworth*.

"changefuller

Than sleeked purples on a pigeon's neck,"

is a comparison of Mr. Smith's fairly ludicrous from the alliteration. Tennyson handles it thus:

"In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove."

"Her unpolluted corse doth sleep in earth."—*Smith*.

"Lay her i' the 'earth and from her unpolluted mold  
May violets spring."—*Shakespeare*.

Passing many pages full of temptation, we strike upon an expression so extremely polite and elegant that we can not refrain from quoting it. When any one speaks of draining

"The rapture of a lifetime at a *gulp*,"

we know it must be Walter, for the simple reason that no one else is well-bred enough to say it.

But here our quotations, already grown tedious perhaps, shall cease. Any general critical estimate of this production, though it might form an appropriate close of our review, could not, on the whole, do good. It would not be sufficiently appreciative to satisfy Mr. Smith's admirers, and an analysis of esthetic deformity, however profitable, is pleasant neither to the analyst nor his audience. I was shown last summer by his Boston publisher a portrait of Mr. Smith. His countenance is fair and youthful, with a certain dreamy, half-mournful, but very pleasing expression. In contemplating it, I must confess I felt some compunctious visitings for the ill opinion I had formed of its possessor. I here give expression to the hope which then I conceived that his face and not his book may be the true exponent of his genius. Milton speaks of a class of poems, "raised from the heat of youth, or the vapors of wine; like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trenched fury of a rhyming parasite." If Alexander Smith, encouraged by injurious advice, has given us such an inspiration, we are sorry for it; but let us hope he may yet go to the same altar at whose sacred fire Milton continually knelt and worshiped, and wait and serve till he shall have well purified his genius, and renewed his heart.



## Other Books by Professor Wilkinson

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**Complete Poetical Works**—Five 8vo vols.,  $\frac{1}{2}$  leather. \$15 per set. Titles: "The Epic of Saul," (2 vols); "The Epic of Moses": The Exodus; "The Epic of Moses": The Wandering in the Wilderness; "Poems": A Collection of Shorter Pieces.

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Here are a few specimen fragments of expression from various sources concerning these books:

### OF "THE EPIC OF SAUL"

*The Independent* (New York): "A stately poem . . . . Cast in a large mould, and finished with deliberate care . . . . Will find a host of appreciative and even enthusiastic readers—a host by no means entirely composed of religious people strictly so-called."

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### OF "THE EPIC OF PAUL"

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"To a student versed in the oratory of all ages, no title or connection would be needed to suggest the only possible subject of the following lines. They spell Webster—not the name, but the orator himself—perfectly, and no other:

'Thought that smote like bolted thunder, passion like the central fires  
Underneath the rocked volcano tossing to and fro its spires;  
Slow imagination kindling, kindling slow, but flaming vast  
Over the wide tract of reason its far-beaming ray to cast;  
Single words like stalwart warriors, of those mailed knights of old,  
Standing unsupported ready for the champion combat bold,  
Words again in serried order, like an irresistible host  
Moving as one man in measure, with a tread to shake the coast.'

To bespeak admiration for poetry of this magnificence would be purely impertinent."

Of "MODERN MASTERS OF PULPIT DISCOURSE"

Dr. ALEXANDER McLAREN (Manchester, Eng.): "I have re-read the book in its new edition and renewed my impression of the keen, and yet kindly, appreciation of every diverse types of excellence which it exhibits. I, of course, speak of the other sketches than the one devoted to himself, in saying, I think that it is admirably just and discriminating and might serve instead of a course of lectures on homiletics—possibly with advantage!"

Prof. PAUL SHOREY (University of Chicago): "I have enjoyed *Modern Masters of Pulpit Discourse* very much. I find a great deal of interesting description and illuminating criticism in it."

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As bearing, though indirectly, on what is contained in the present volume, a few critical expressions may be quoted concerning a previous publication of Prof. Wilkinson's, now out of print.

*The Westminster Review* (London): "It is not a frequent pleasure to meet with English essay-writing so fresh, forceful and terse as Mr. Wilkinson's; and especially rare is it to receive from the other side of the Atlantic, writing so good, and valuation of English authors so sympathetic and appreciative."

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